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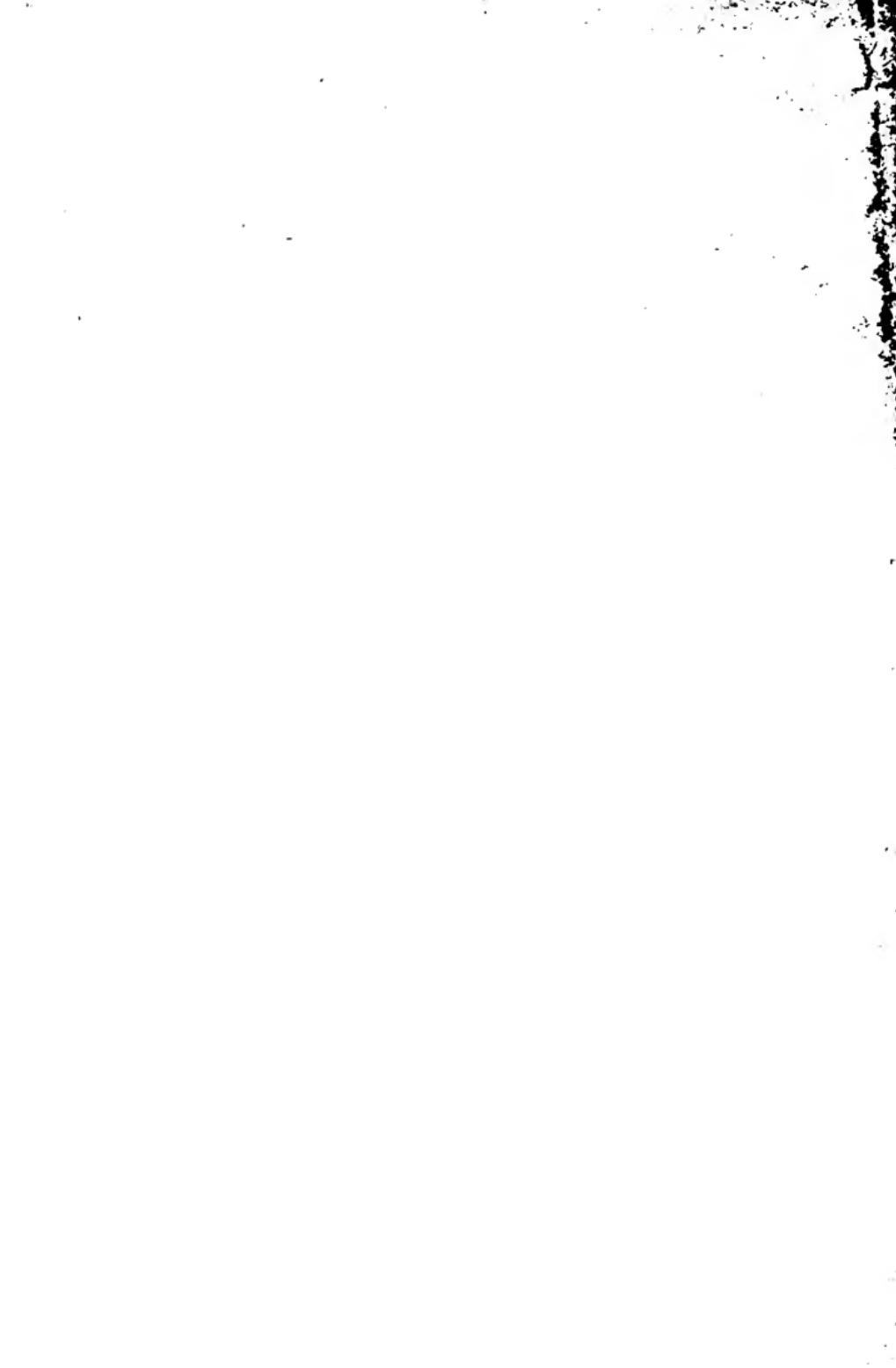
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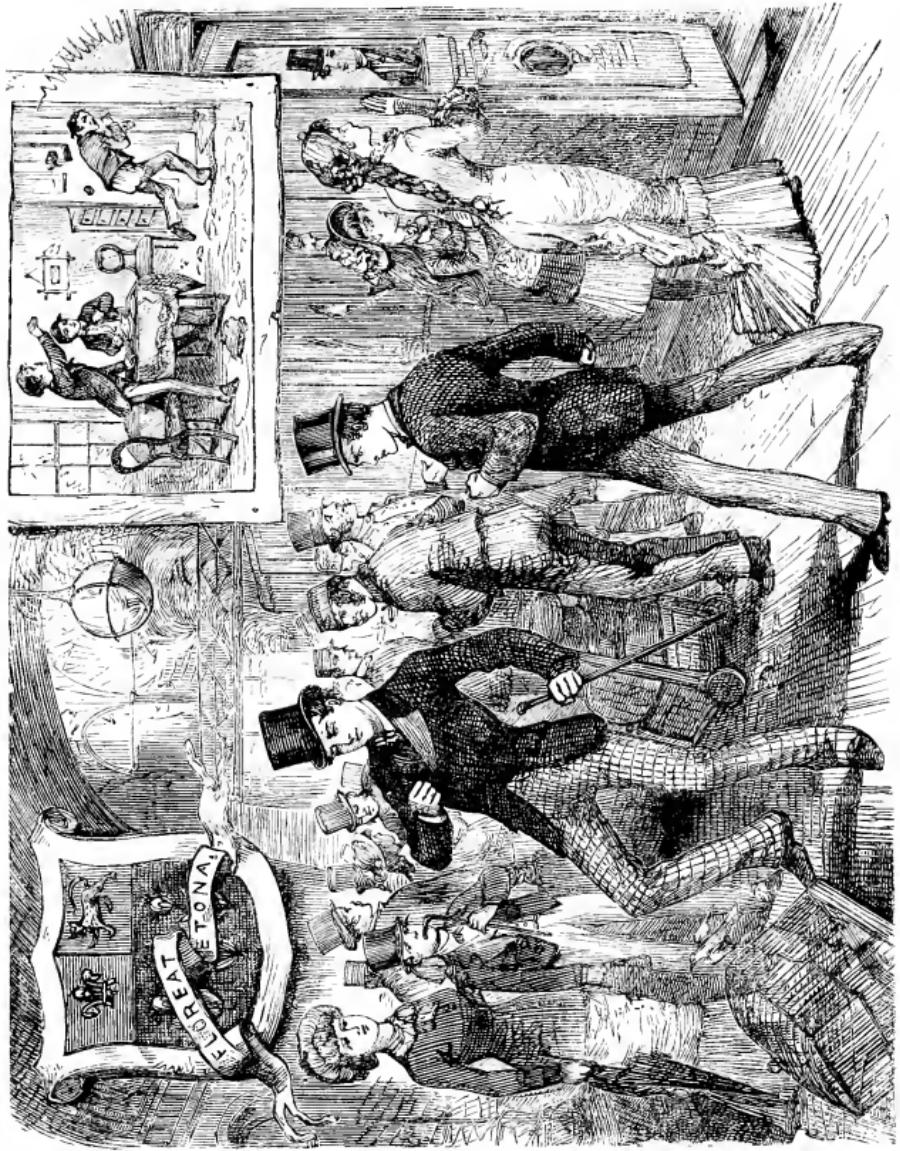
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THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON;

OR,

The Adventures of Two College Chums.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHUMS MEET.

"THE First and Second Forms, and the Lower School, will return to Eton on the 14th of April. The Fourth Form and Removes and the Upper School on the 15th. The Sixth Form on the 16th."

Such was the announcement in the newspapers, and as may be imagined, quite a number of boys assembled at the Great Western station in London on the fourteenth.

The station in the afternoon was crowded by Etonians, who were anxious to catch the half-past three train from Paddington, and get down before dark to college.

This is not to be wondered at, when it is considered that Eton contains nearly a thousand boys, has nearly 20 masters, including classical and mathematical masters, the boys living in different houses, dotted about the college precincts, and going at certain hours to the school buildings, which are in a central position on the Slough Road.

Among the boys who were looking after their luggage on the platform was one who appeared to take a great interest in a canary bird in a gilded cage.

He was tall, fair, and not bad-looking, about fourteen years of age, but too slim to be very strong.

"Put that bird in the carriage with me, porter," said he, pointing to a first-class in which he had placed some books and papers.

"Yes, sir. One moment, sir," replied the porter, who was busily engaged in waiting on another young gentleman.

He was expecting a tip, for he knew that Eton boys are always generous in return for any little attention paid them.

The boy turned his back for awhile, and a stout, thick-set, dark-complexioned young fellow stumbled up against the cage, upsetting it.

"Halloa!!" cried the owner of the bird, who heard it fall, and instantly turned round; "what did you do that for?"

"Because I couldn't help it," was the reply.

"I believe you did it on purpose."

"You have a perfect right to your own opinion," said the other boy, who spoke with a strong foreign accent.

He had not the look of an Englishman, but seemed to spring from a different race.

Rings sparkled on his fingers, a diamond pin flashed in his scarf, he wore a heavy gold watch chain with two lockets, and was evidently well off.

"Pick it up again," cried the boy with the bird.

"I'll see you hanged first, and then I won't," was the reply.

"Who are you?"

"My name's Timor. I've no reason to be ashamed of it. If you want me, I'm an Eton boy, and you'll hear of me in the college."

"My name's Owen Tudor," exclaimed the other, who was red with rage. "I'm a Welshman, and in my country we don't stand any nonsense."

"I'm a Russian. My father's attached to the embassy here," said Timor, "and if I had you in Russia, I'd have you knotted till you learnt how to keep a civil tongue in your head."

"Well, I must say you look like the villain of old, Timon the Tartar," laughed Owen Tudor.

"Yes, you will find me a Tartar if

you provoke me, so I advise you to be more civil to me in future."

"Pick up my birdeage," cried the Welsh boy.

"I shan't, and that's as flat as the valley of the Volga."

Owen Tudor did not want to make a scene at the railway station.

But, at the same time, he did not care about putting up with the young Russian's insolence.

He advanced to him with a threatening gesture.

"Oh!" exclaimed Timor, "your bird seems to be a great worry to you. I think I will relieve you from it."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this."

The evil-looking Timor gave the cage a kick with his foot, which opened the door, and the bird being liberated from its confinement, flew up to the roof of the station, where it perched on a rafter among some very smutty sparrows, who all began to chirp at his intrusion, some of the more indignant pecking at him.

This was more than Owen Tudor could stand.

"Confound you, take that!" he said, aiming a blow at him.

Timor warded it off with a cane he carried in his hand, and the whistle blowing for the train to start, he jumped into a carriage, the guard locking the door.

He gave the guard half-a-sovereign in an ostentatious manner.

"Keep this carriage for me," he said; "I want it to myself. I hate travelling with a lot of cads."

Owen Tudor was furious.

Shaking his fist at the aristocratic young Russian, who was laughing impudently at him, he exclaimed—

"Come out of that and fight me like a man."

"I can't," replied Timor.

"Why not?"

"For two reasons."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, I don't want to kill you at present; secondly, I'm locked in."

The guard touched Owen Tudor on the shoulder.

"Now, sir, if you're going on," he said.

He held open the door of a carriage, and as the train was already beginning

to move, Owen bestowed one malignant glance at Timor and another sad one at the empty cage.

Then he stepped in, the door was shut, and the train rolled out of the station.

He found himself in the company of two boys, one of whom sat opposite him, and was stout, well-built, healthy, and apparently good-tempered, with a profusion of curly hair, clear blue eyes, and a well-cut mouth.

The other was small, rather undersized, decidedly ugly, with a comical expression of countenance, and a sort of perpetual grin on his face.

"I say," exclaimed the one opposite Owen, "excuse me for talking to you, but that was a beastly shame of that big fellow. I saw him kick the cage over, and if it had come to a row I'd have helped you."

"Would you?"

"Yes, I would, for he is too much for one of your age. You said your name was Tudor, didn't you? Mine is Jack Dashley."

"Thanks for your sympathy," replied Owen. "I think I could have got at the great big brute if the train hadn't started so soon."

"He's a regular Russian Bear, and looks as strong," said Jack Dashley.

"Russian Bear, yes, that's the only name for him," answered Owen. "I liked that bird. It was a parting present from my mother."

"Are you a new fellow?" asked Jack Dashley.

"Yes. Are you?"

"I am. My people wanted to see me off, but I chose to come alone. We have been down to Eton, and I know where I am going, so I didn't want any kissing and hand-shaking at the station; it is bad form."

"Just my case," said Owen. "Have you ever been to school before?"

"Oh, yes. I was three years at a private school. This is my first shy at a public one," answered Dashley.

"I had a private tutor at home. Whose house are you going to at Eton?"

"Mr. Dryasdust's," replied Jack Dashley. "And you?"

"By Jove! that is strange. He is to be my master too. I say, we ought to chum up, you and I."

"We will. I'm agreeable," said Jack Dashley. "I like your looks."

"So do I yours. Is it a bargain, old fellow?" cried Owen.

"It is, as far as I am concerned. We will be chums all the time we are at college, and make an alliance, offensive and defensive agaist the Russian Bear."

"Agreed."

They shook hands cordially, and the compact was sealed.

The third boy in the carriage could not help hearing what they were talking about, and when they had finished he spoke.

"Excuse me, you two new fellows, he exclaimed. "I am an old boy in my second half at Eton, and I can tell you a great deal about the school."

"I suppose you can," replied Jack Dashley.

"Let me introduce myself."

"I shall be very glad to know you."

Owen Tudor echoed this sentiment, and with the true instinct of Eton boys, they bowed to one another like little men.

"My name's Jimmy Jingo," continued the third boy, "and I board at Butler's. That's the next house to yours in Keat's Lane."

"Who's Keat?" asked Jack.

"He was head master once upon a time. Why he had a lane I don't know, but that's what they call it. He was the flogging head master, and would birch a fellow for being two minutes' late for school."

"That's pleasant," remarked Owen Tudor.

"You wouldn't say so if you were in for it."

"Are there a nice set of fellows at our house?" asked Jack.

"Not particularly. They bully a good deal, and you'll find the fagging rather hard."

"Do you know Timor?"

"Don't I? and I hate him. We had a fight once, and he licked me in no time. I'd like to see some one tackle him. He's in your house, and you'll have all you want of him. They say his father is awfully rich in Russia, and his mot'r is a lady of English rank; but he's more Russian than English."

"So I should think."

"They tell funny tales about him at

your tutor's," continued Jimmy Jingo. "I've heard that he keeps a cane in his room to thrash the small boys."

During the remainder of the journey Jimmy Jingo gave them much valuable information, which it is unnecessary to repeat here, and by the time they reached their destination they knew so much about Eton that they fancied they had been there six months.

Arriving at Windsor, Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor took a cab, and were driven across the river Thames into the village of Eton.

Then they crossed the bridge over Barn's Pool, and were in the sacred precincts of the college.

Jack was the son of a fashionable doctor in London, who was personally known to Mr. Dryasdust.

Owen sprang from an old Welsh family, and his father and grandfather had been educated at Eton.

Mr. Dryasdust received the boys kindly, and showed them to their rooms, which were plainly furnished, each having a table, a shut-up bedstead—let down at night—three chairs, and a carpet.

Everybody has his own room, in which he takes his breakfast and tea.

He was allowed a pound of sugar and a quarter-of-a-pound of tea every week.

A slice of bread and a pat of butter was supplied at each meal.

Anything else he wanted he had to buy.

Dinner and supper were served in the dining room, when all sat down together.

There were two galleries in the house, one above the other, each containing about twenty rooms, so that there were forty boys in the house when full.

An old woman waited upon the inmates of each gallery, and the name of the one on Jack's floor was Susan.

Jack found that his room adjoined that of Owen's.

A nice fire burned in the grate, and Susan had laid the cloth as the boys entered, while the small tea kettle hissed merrily.

You two young gents seem to be friends," she remarked; "and I should advise you to mess together."

"We met for the first time to-day," replied Jack. "But we have arranged to be chums all the time we are at

college. What do you mean by messing together?"

"Taking your meals, sir?"

"Oh, I see—a very good idea. What do you say, Owen?"

Owen Tudor was quite pleased, and a servant just then brought up a little hamper of good things, with which Mrs. Dashley had provided her son.

A couple of fowls, a ham, sundry pots of jam, and a boiled tongue are rather calculated to quicken the appetites of two hungry boys.

"You makes your own tea, sir," exclaimed Susan. "It's lock-up at six at this time of the year, supper at nine, prayers at half-past, and candles taken away at ten. I'll call you in the morning at seven, in time for school."

Mr. Dryasdust had previously tested the capacity of the boys, and had informed them that they would be placed in the fourth form, the lowest division of the upper school.

Sitting down to tea, they felt quite at home, and began to enjoy themselves.

"This isn't half bad," observed Jack, with his mouth full of ham and fowl."

"None so dusty," replied Owen. "I've fared worse."

While he spoke the door opened, and a dark-haired boy, with a sneaking look, entered.

"Who are you?" asked Jack, looking up; "and what do you want?"

"I'm Funnybird Minor," was the reply.

"Minor! what does that mean?"

"What a fool you are not to know that. Minor means less, and major great. I've got a big brother. He's Funnybird Major, and I'm called Funnybird Minor, to distinguish us."

"You look like a funny bird. You're all legs and wings, and you've got a beak like a pelican," said Jack.

Funnybird Minor certainly had a very big nose, curved somewhat like a beak, but he did not like this allusion to it.

"Don't you chaff my nose," he said. "If my major heard you, there'd be a row, and you'd be in it."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. You can sneer, but my major always licks fellows who cheek me. I did not come here to have a row, though. You smelt so good from the

outside, that I thought I'd come and see what you had got to eat."

"Your nose guided you."

"Let my nose alone, I tell you, it don't belong to you," cried Funnybird Minor.

"I should be sorry if it did, but I'm not touching it—wouldn't touch it with a pair of tongs," replied Jack.

Funnybird eyed the tongue in a hungry way.

"Give us some of that. I didn't bring any grub back with me," he said.

"That's no reason why you should come eadging from us," replied Owen Tudor.

"Won't you let me join you?"

"No," said Jack and Owen in a breath.

"Then I'll tell my brother; he'll soon make you," threatened Funnybird Minor. "My major likes me. He's second cook of the house; only Careless the captain can lick him, and he messes with Timor. What Timor and he can't do isn't worth doing."

"You little beast, get out," cried Owen, "or, as I'm a Welshman, I'll put you out."

"A Welshman," are you?"

"Yes, I am, and there's nothing to be ashamed of in that."

"Ba-a-a! you look like a Welsh goat! ba-a-a!" cried Funnybird Minor, retreating to the door.

Jack Dashley threw a piece of bread at him, which he narrowly dodged by ducking his head.

"Wait till I tell my major," he said. "Ba-a-a!"

Then he disappeared through the door.

"He's a cool fish," remarked Jack, "I wonder if there are many more like him in the house?"

"Hang his impudence," said Owen, whose face was flushed. "He 'ba-a-ed' at me like a goat, and I can't stand that."

Jack was afraid there was trouble brewing, because Funnybird Minor had a vindictive, bad face, and if his brother was as strong as he said, it was no use resisting him, for a small boy cannot fight one older and stronger than himself.

Then again, he was a friend of Timor's.

They messed together, and it would be absurd for either himself or Owen to tackle the Russian, who was too big for them.

That fellow Funnybird is a hot member," remarked Jack, "and I'm a false prophet if there is not going to be a row."

"I think so too," answered Owen; "let's hide the grub."

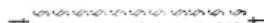
"Good!" I'll do it," said Jack.

He hurriedly removed the things from the table and put them on the top of the shut-up bedstead, which was the

only hiding-place he cou'd think of, and that was not a very secure one, yet it was better than none.

Scarcely had he succeeded in doing so, and resumed his place at the table, than the door opened.

A tall, thick-set boy, who was Funnybird Major, and the evil-looking Timor entered, while young Funnybird stood behind them.



CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST NIGHT AT ETON.

"WHAT'S your name, you new fellow?" cried Funnybird.

Jack told him, as did Owen on being asked a similar question.

"Now Dashley and Tudor," continued Funnybird, "where's the grub you wouldn't give my brother?"

"Gone," replied Jack.

"I can see that; but where is it gone?"

Jack pointed to the region of his stomach, to convey the idea that he had eaten it.

"Eaten it?"

"Yes, haven't we come to Ea-ton?"

"I'll teach you to tell lies and make bad puns," said Funnybird; "we don't allow new boys to be too fresh."

He seized Jack by the arm, and twisting it half round, hit him with his fist on the muscular portion of it, causing him considerable pain.

Funnybird Minor produced a knotted rope from his pocket, which he called his knot, and began, with Funnybird's help, to bit Owen on the back with it.

While this was going on Funnybird Minor hunted about like a cat for the good things which had been so carefully stowed away.

"I've got 'em," he cried, hauling the fowl and ham and tongue down from the top of the bed.

"All right. Take them away. They are confiscated," replied his brother.

Laughing merrily, Funnybird Minor was about to obey the welcome order, when a handsome fair young man about seventeen appeared on the threshold.

He had been attracted by the noise made by Jack and Owen, for it may be

readily supposed that they did not maintain silence while they were being licked by two stronger and older boys than themselves, helped too by a third.

"Funnybird and Timor!" he exclaimed, "stop that. And you,—he added to the other—"put those things back on the table. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to bag a fellow's grub, and especially a new fellow."

Funnybird Minor looked abashed, and did as he was told with an ill-grace, while his brother and Timor released their victims.

The newcomer was a fifth-form boy named Sutherland.

He was a thorough gentleman in every sense of the word.

An excellent scholar, he at the same time was a good cricketer—bad been two years in the eleven, and excelled in boating.

His moral influence in the house was great, and because the boys knew that he could support it by physical force if he liked, they paid great respect to him.

"Can't you let a new fellow alone?" continued Sutherland. "The house is getting quite a bad name for bullying, and you two men are the principal cause of it."

"They cheeked my minor and shied bread at him," replied Funnybird, sulkily.

"Just leave them alone and clear out of here as soon as possible."

"I don't see what right you have to order us about."

"If you don't do as I tell you I'll call the captain of the house," said Sutherland.

It happened that Careless, the captain in question, came by at the time, and hearing Sutherland's voice, entered the room.

"I was looking for you!" he exclaimed. "The sixth and fifth forms are going to choose their fags for the half. But what's the row?"

"Oh, the old thing—Funnybird and Timor bullying as usual," replied Sutherland.

Careless was a good-natured boy, and he seldom interfered unless it was absolutely necessary.

In the present instance he thought that it was.

"You'll have to stop this, you fellows," he cried. "Two boys left our house last half and have gone to another because they were bullied so. They would not say who did it, but when my tutor spoke to me to-day about it I could have told him."

"Sneaks don't flourish at Eton," answered Funnybird.

"No," said Timor, "the atmosphere does not seem to agree with them."

"I don't know that a sneak is any worse than a bully," remarked Careless. "But this I do know, the house is getting a bad name, and Mr. Dryasdust has asked me as captain to stop it."

"Has he? Why doesn't he make you a private detective at once? I expect your father was one," laughed Funnybird Major.

This observation irritated Careless, who extended his hand and gave the speaker a box on the ear which sent him spinning, and caused his brother to get out of the door as quick as possible, abandoning all ulterior designs on the fowls and ham.

"What did you do that for?" asked Funnybird, clenching his fists.

"To teach you a lesson. Let these two new fellows alone. The same remark applies to you, Timor."

Funnybird and Timor walked out of the room with deep passion in their hearts, and Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor felt much relieved.

"If those men bully you any more come to me; my room is at the end of the passage!" exclaimed Careless. "I'm captain of this house, and by Jove! I'll take a little more trouble than I have hitherto done to preserve order. Come

on, Sutherland, let us arrange about the fags."

"Shall we have to fag?" asked Jack.

"Yes; all boys not in the fifth form have to."

"I'd like to fag for you then, if I can," replied Jack.

"I can't promise you that," said Careless. "Because we put all the names in a bag, and the masters who are entitled to have fags draw for them."

"Will Funnybird and Timor draw?"

"Yes, they are entitled to one each."

"It will be a nice look out if they draw us. What shall we have to do?"

Careless smiled.

"Oh, nothing very bad," he replied. "Sutherland and I have been through it, and you see we are still alive. Don't meet trouble half-way; a good deal depends upon the master you get."

So saying, the captain of the house and Sutherland went away to arrange about the fags, and Jack and Owen sat down to finish their tea.

"We got out of that pretty well," remarked Owen, "though I feel sore from that Russian knout yet."

"They will let us alone after what Careless said, I should think," Jack observed.

A peculiar noise came from the adjoining room.

It was like one goat calling to another on the mountain top.

"Ba-a-a! Ba-a-a!"

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Owen, "that's Funnybird Minor. He's at it again. I'll goat him."

He jumped up and ran angrily into Funnybird's room, where he beheld that comic young gentleman leaning his head against the wall, engaged in the interesting occupation of "ba-ing," while seated in the arm-chair with which he had garnished his apartment was a short stout boy with a fat face, who was laughing till his sides ached.

This was Bill Bragg, a vulgar boy, who told no end of stories, and was always boasting of the "swells" he knew and the wonderful things he did, and the position of his friends at home.

The truth being that his father was a drysalter in the Barbican, who had married his cook, and having made a little money sent his son to a public

school, choosing Eton as the most aristocratic.

There was nothing in all this for Bill Bragg to be ashamed of, but he always wanted to make himself out better than he really was, and this occasionally made him ridiculous, for he could not help being found out at times.

"Ba-a-a! m-a-a," went Funnybird Minor.

"Go it—what a lark!" exclaimed Bill Bragg, adding—as he saw Owen Tudor enter—"Oh, erickey! here's a case of scissors. The goat's come."

Jack followed Owen, because he felt bound to help him.

Without waiting to ask for any explanation, Owen gave Funnybird a kick which lifted him about three inches in the air, and landed him on all fours on the floor.

"Great Cæsar," cried Funnybird, "what's that?" It seemed as if the side of a house had fallen on me."

"It's only me," answered Owen. "I'm here if you want any more."

"I'm not a hog," replied Funnybird, rubbing his leg; "that will last me for to-night."

"Don't you imitate goats," said Owen. "If there are goats in Wales, they are better than English curs like you."

"I'll tell my brother," said Funnybird.

"If you do, I'll go to the captain of the house; he promised to protect us," exclaimed Jack Dashley.

"Us?" repeated Funnybird. "What have you to do with it?"

"We are chums. I've palled up with Tudor, and any one who offends him offends me. That's what's the matter."

Funnybird indulged in a sneer.

"I suppose you are some private school lad," he replied. "They are always fond of sneaking, but we'll quickly knock that out of you."

"I have been to a private school," answered Jack. "This is my first appearance at a public one, but I'm happy to say that we had no such fellow as you. If you talk about telling your brother, is not that as bad as my telling Careless?"

"All I know is, I'll have my revenge," growled Funnybird.

Seeing that he would not fight, and that he had no further inclination to

ba-a, Owen was satisfied with the chastisement he had inflicted.

Bill Bragg was a great talker, and he could not resist the temptation to say something.

"That wasn't half a bad kick," he remarked. "I like to see everything slap-bang and all alive. The other day I kicked a crossing-sweeper right across the street for asking me for a penny."

"More shame for you," replied Jack.

"Oh, that's nothing. A week ago a fellow came playing an organ outside our house; he wouldn't go away, so I gave him a sender which knocked him slick into his organ, slap-bang, and no mistake."

"What did he do then?"

"Crawled out again on the other side, and the music went on the same as ever, only a little out of tune."

Jack laughed, and was about to make some answer, when Timor entered the room.

"Where's Dashley," he asked.

"Here," replied Jack.

"You're my fag for this half," he continued, "and if you don't come up to time, I pity you, that's all."

Dashley felt as if some one had stabbed him with a knife.

Of all the fifth-form boys at Eton, Timor was the last he would have liked to fag for.

"I mess with Funnybird Major," said Timor; "and you will have to come at nine o'clock and get our breakfast ready. If the kettle doesn't boil and you spoil the tea in making it, I'm sorry for you, Where's Tudor?"

"I'm Tudor!" answered Owen.

"Oh, yes. I remember you," exclaimed Timor; "you are the man whose bird I gave freedom to. Well, you are Funnybird Major's fag, so both of you will have to wait on us."

Having made this announcement, the Russian went away, satisfied that he had caused the two boys as much discomfort as was possible in about the space of three minutes.

"My eyes!" said Bill Bragg, "won't you have a lively time of it? I fagged last half for Timor, and he's a beauty. On the fifth of November he put a torpedo on a chair, made me sit on it, lighted it, and sent me flying up to the ceiling, slap-bang, and all alive."

"Did it hurt you?" asked Jack.

"I couldn't wear a collar for a week. I stuck in the ceiling, and they had to make a hole in the roof to get me out, slap-bang, and all alive."

This was more than either Jack or Owen could stand, and they went back to their own rooms.

Jack helped Owen to make his room comfortable and put his things away, and then Owen performed the same kind offices for him, after which they sat by the fire, talking until supper time.

They were very much annoyed at the idea of having to sag for Timor and Funnybird, but as it was their luck to be drawn by them there was no help for it.

After supper and prayers, at which they saw quite a small army of boys, they went upstairs again.

Most of the fellows in their house had returned on the first day, though some of the fifth and sixth form claimed the privilege of the extra day accorded to them.

Feeling tired, they were not sorry to go to bed.

Susan came to take their candles.

Owen was sitting on Jack's bed in his nightshirt, and ran into his room.

"I think you'd better look out, sir!" she exclaimed.

"What for?" asked Jack.

"A new boy generally has some tricks played on him, and I heard Mr. Funnybird mention your name."

"I wish Funnybird would let me alone!" exclaimed Jack.

"He'll have to leave the house if he goes on the way he's been a-going, sir," replied Susan; "and Mr. Timor's worse than him. I'd lock my door, sir."

"There's no lock to it, Susan; I looked at it just now."

"Bless me! that's a fact. Well, you must get a bolt put on to-morrow; most gentlemen do. Good night, sir, and I hope as how you'll sleep well."

Jack thanked her, but he did not feel at his ease.

And though he courted sleep, it did not come.

He was thinking of Funnybird Major and Timor, wondering what they would do, and feeling in confusion about this new world of Eton, on the waters of which his frail barque had been launched.

While he half dozed he thought he heard footsteps approaching his room.

He listened.

It was not a mistake.

Some one was in the corridor.

His door opened.

He scarcely dared to breathe.

He heard, or rather felt, that some one was in the room.

What should he do?

His first impulse was to jump out of bed and ask what the intruder wanted, but resisting this, he remained perfectly still.

All at once he felt his feet going up in the air, and the blood rushed to his head.

Jack could not make out what was happening to him, but in less than ten seconds he was standing on his head, as it were.

There was a sharp click as the button was turned outside the bed, and he knew that he was "shut up."

Of all the practical jokes which an Etonian has to undergo, being shut up in a folding-bedstead is the worst.

Jack Dashley was unable to move.

He could not regain his erect position.

All he was able to accomplish was to keep the clothes from his mouth with his hands, and so get a little air.

He felt a sense of heaviness and approaching suffocation.

If this confinement lasted much longer he would die, for he was sure he could not bear it.

Oh, Heaven! what would he not have given for just one little breath of air!

He struggled like a maniac; his eyes seemed to be bursting out of his head, and he screamed hoarsely for help.

The bedclothes muffled his voice, and his piteous entreaties could not be heard.

"Help, help!" he cried, in a stifled voice.

But no help came.

He gave himself up for lost, and thinking of his mother, he tried to breathe a prayer, after which he grew dizzy, seeing green fields and hearing the notes of singing birds like a drowning man.

Suddenly he felt the bed pulled down.

The blood rushed from his head and began to circulate in his body once more.

A flood of cold air refreshed him.

He saw a light, and standing by his side was Sutherland.

"Are you better?" asked the latter, kindly.

Jack, after a time, gasped out—

"Yes, thank you."

"I suspected something of this kind," continued Sutherland, "and that is what made me come to your room."

"You came just in time. I thought I was dying," cried Jack, still lying helpless on the bed.

"It is no joke to be shut up. I have gone through it myself, though, thank goodness, I was never cowardly enough to do it to anyone else. These infernal bullies ought to be punished."

"Who did it, do you think?" asked Jack, sitting up at last.

"Oh, Timor and Funnybird. I saw them in the passage, but they ran away when they twigged me."

Jack got out of bed and shook himself.

"I'm all right now," he exclaimed. "But, I say, have you been to look after Tudor?"

"Not yet."

"If they would attack me, you may depend they would go for him too; my chum, I mean. Perhaps he is as badly off as I was."

"That is so," said Sutherland. "We will see. Come with me."

They hastily made their way into the next room, and with the aid of Sutherland's candle, looked for Owen.

The bed was rumpled, and had evidently been slept in, but they could find no trace of its owner.

"Why, where on earth is he?" said Jack Dashley.

Sutherland looked around in a perplexed manner.

"They cannot have killed him, and thrown him out of the window," continued Jack.

This remark gave Sutherland an idea,

for he went to the window, which was open, and looked out.

"Here he is," he cried, beginning to haul up something.

Jack hastened to his side, and saw the two ends of a sheet tied to the bar which ran across the centre of the window.

Owen Tudor had been placed in the sheet, and lowered from the window, being left to hang in mid-air until his tormentors chose to release him.

If he had struggled in the least degree, he would have dropped out, and falling on the ground below, seriously injured himself.

He was naturally very much alarmed, and felt as much relieved as Jack did when he was released.

"Are you hurt, Owen?" asked Jack, squeezing his hand.

"Not much," replied Tudor. "The beasts seized me when I was half asleep, and nearly strangled me, so that I shouln't holloa. They then put me in the sheet and slung me out of the window, telling me if I struggled I should be killed."

"How long have you been there?"

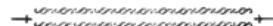
"Oh, a good five minutes, though it seemed an age. I daren't move. If this is coming to Eton, I wish I had stayed at home."

"It doesn't always happen," said Sutherland. "Those bullies are a disgrace to the house."

"And we have to fag for them," groaned Owen.

"Never mind," replied Sutherland. "You have a friend in me, and they are afraid of Careless. If they perform on you again, let us know. Now go to bed. I don't think you will be troubled again to-night."

He left them, and after condoling with one another, they retired to rest a second time, Sutherland being right in his conjecture, for they were not disturbed any more that night.



CHAPTER III.

IN WINDSOR FOREST.

PUNCTUALLY at seven Susan called the boys, and turning out of bed, they dressed, feeling that strange sense of

loneliness which one always experiences at waking up in a strange place.

They soon found their way to the

school-yard, where all the schoolrooms were, by following the crowd of boys hastening from the different houses, and took their places in the Upper School with the rest of their division.

As it was their first morning, and they were not supplied with books yet, they were not called upon to do any work.

After school they went back to their tutor's for prayers, and then proceeded to Timor's room to do their fagging.

It was very handsomely furnished, for he had the command of money, and had not spared any expense.

The walls were covered with handsome engravings.

He had flowers in his window, and being fond of music, had bought a piano.

Jack went to the cupboard and took out the tea, while Owen saw that the kettle boiled, and Timor and Funnybird talked together near the window.

"How many spoonfuls of tea shall I put in?" asked Jack.

"Find out," replied Funnybird. "You two mess together, and you ought to know how much is required for two."

"Do you like it strong?"

"Yes. Don't bother me."

Jack made the tea, placed the teapot on the table, and was about to walk away.

"Where are you off to?" asked Timor.

"To my own room. Don't you suppose I want some breakfast?" replied Jack.

"Well, you won't have any yet. Take this shilling and go down to Webber's for a shilling's worth of hot sausages."

"And you, Tudor," said Funnybird Major, "cut along to the baker and bring a couple of hot college rolls."

He gave him some money, and the lads departed to get their hats.

In the passage they met Bill Bragg.

"Were are you off to?" he asked.

"Sausages," replied Jack in a melancholy tone of voice.

"Hot college rolls," answered Owen, in an equally lachrymose manner, "and I don't know where the bakery is."

"And I could not tell Webber's from Kinscharka," said Jack.

"I fag for Careless," exclaimed Bragg. "I'm going for rolls, so one of you can come with me. Webber's is down by

Barn's Pool. My master looked as if he would like to have sausages this morning, but he didn't send me."

"Why didn't he?" asked Jack.

"Because he looked in my eye and saw an expression there, slap-bang and all alive, that told him I wouldn't go. If Careless said a word to me I didn't like, I'd back out of the room and let him do his own fagging."

Unfortunately for the boaster, Careless had been into some one's room to borrow a Greek Lexicon, and he heard this remark of his fag's.

"Oh, you would, eh?" he exclaimed. "We will see. When you have brought me my hot rolls you shall go up to Layton's and fetch me a penny bun. Cut along."

Bill Bragg looked very foolish, as well he might, for Layton's was a confectioner's shop in Windsor, nearly opposite the Curfew Tower of the Castle.

If he ran all the way there and back it would take him half-an-hour to go, and he would have no time to eat his own breakfast.

He might have bought such a simple thing as a bun anywhere, but he knew that his master would look at the bag, and if he did not see Layton's name on it he would be sent back.

"Shall you go?" asked Jack.

"Yes, I'll humour him this time. He looks as if he wanted a bun, and he is not a bad sort when you come to know him. This is the second half I have fagged for him."

"Indeed."

"The fact is I begin quite to like him."

"So I should think."

"And I can't find it in my heart to refuse him anything," said Bragg. "Tatta! stroll on. I mustn't keep him waiting, poor fellow."

He and Owen started off to the bakery, and Jack went after the sausages, laughing at the ingenious way in which Bragg got himself out of a dilemma.

When fagging was over he and Owen had their breakfast, and came to the conclusion that though it was a nuisance, there was not anything very difficult after all in the system.

At eleven they had to go into school and translate some easy Latin, such as Caesar or Livy.

Then the time until dinner, from a quarter to twelve to two, was their own.

Jack Dashley had heard so much about Windsor Castle that he was very anxious to visit and roam in the park or forest.

He thought of the dungeons, vaults, sliding panels in the old towers, and the subterranean passages that must exist.

He called to mind the legend of Herne the Hunter, and wondered whether the weird huntsman and his coal-black steed were ever seen now.

Owen readily agreed to walk up town with him, and they only regretted that they had no companion to show them the way.

They were standing in the schoolyard near the statue, gazing at the size of the old chapel.

On the other side was Lower School and Long Chamber, in which were to be seen the collegians in their long gowns.

Suddenly Jack saw Bragg running towards them.

"I say!" he cried; "your fools if you stop here."

"Why are we?"

"You see those fives courts alongside the chapel? Well, they will be filled soon with fellows playing fives, and they always look round for a lower boy to fag for them. It means picking up balls for a couple of hours, that's all. Oh, I'm slap-bang, and all alive."

They all hastened to avoid a species of fagging which was anything but agreeable.

"Are you going to be a wet bob or a dry bob?" asked Bragg. "Every one here has to be one or the other. Let me explain: a wet bob means a boating man; a dry bob, a cricketer."

"I don't know yet," replied Jack; "though I think I prefer the water."

"Where are you going now?" asked Bragg, who was not backward at asking questions.

"Up to see the Castle? Will you come with us?"

"Just to oblige you," answered Bragg; "though I don't care much about it; you see, I go there so often. My people are very intimate at court, and the Queen invites me up to play with the princes until it becomes a bore."

"Then you know the Queen?"

"Oh, yes, slap-bang and all alive. I

call her Vic, and I'm never anything else than Billy."

Jack could not refrain from smiling at the impudence of the fellow's stories, in which he knew there was not a grain of truth, but as he found him a little amusing, he did not say anything.

They walked up the Eton High Street and into Windsor, where the castle burst upon them in all its beauty and grandeur.

Ascending by the hundred steps at the base of the Curfew Tower, they reached the terrace, on which they walked, afterwards skirting the Round Tower, from the top of which floated the Royal Standard, which indicated that Her Majesty was at home.

"Vic's in," said Bragg, carelessly. "But I don't think I'll call on her today. Let's get into the park. We may see Herne the Hunter."

A thrill of superstitious fear ran through the veins of Jack and Owen at the mention of the name.

"Do you believe in him?" Jack asked.

"Why shouldn't I, when I saw him one day on his coal-black horse, breathing fire and smoke? Slap-bang and all alive."

"What did you do—run?"

"Not I," replied Bragg; "I cracked a stone and it went clean through him; nothing but a spirit, my boy."

They quitted the castle by the postern at the top of the hill, and got into the forest at the beginning of the Long Walk.

The season being mild and forward, the trees were just beginning to bud, the grass looked fresh and green, the sun shone brightly, the birds sang blithely, and the merry brown hares sat in the ferns, while the rooks cawed overhead as they built their nests.

Cutting across an open glade, they came to a lot of fern, in which some deer were grazing.

"Look out, young gentlemen," cried a man, appearing from behind a tree.

He was dressed in a coat of Lincoln green and corduroy trousers; in his hand he carried a gun,

"That's Gunstock the keeper," said Bragg; "I know him."

"It seems to me you know everybody," answered Jack.

"Pretty nearly. What's up, Gunstock? Is Herne about, slap-bang and all alive?" he asked.

"Not as I knows on?" replied the keeper. "But this is the time o' year it is dangerous to come a-nigh the stags."

"Ah, so it is. I'd forgotten that; thank you."

"It is no joke to be hyked by a stag royal, with ten tines," remarked Gunstock; "and there's another thing I want to warn you of."

"What's that, old man?"

"There's a band of Russian gipsies in the park. The Queen won't have them put out, why I can't tell, but it's my orders not to touch them unless they do something."

"Why should we be afraid of them?"

"Because there's strange tales of robbery and murder going about."

"Murder?" echoed the boys in a breath.

"Ay, murder," replied Gunstock, in a mysterious way.

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE SCENES.

The boys waited with breathless expectation for the gamekeeper to continue his recital, for there was something weird and exciting about those mysterious Russian gipsies, who lived in security in the heart of the old forest, and who were said to plunder and even murder people.

"Yes, gentlemen," continued Gunstock, "I found the dead body of a man yesterday in a heap of fern."

"What kind of a man?" asked Jack.

"He seemed a decent kind of fellow. I took the body to the Town Hall, and some folks say he had escaped from a lunatic asylum and committed suicide, but it's my opinion that the gipsies robbed and murdered him."

The boys were deeply impressed.

"Therefore," added Gunstock, "I advise you to keep away from them. Mind, I may be wrong, still it looks fishy. You ain't got 'ere a bit o' baccy about you, sir?"

This request was addressed to Jack Dushley.

"I don't use the weed, but here's a shilling to get some. Your yarn is worth that," Jack replied.

"All I know is," said Bill Bragg, "that a whole army of gipsies wouldn't frighten me, and Russians are a set of cowards. I once fought four gipsies and licked the lot."

"Why didn't you say five?" remarked Owen.

"Oh, I wouldn't tell a lie about a gipsy," replied Bragg, with perfect

gravity; "and I know this. I am not going to spoil my walk on account of what Gunstock has said. If the Russians say anything to me, I'll——"

He paused, as if what he would do was too terrible to mention.

"What will you do?" inquired Jack.

"You'll see if you live long enough."

Suddenly the stags began to fight, and roused the attention of the boys by the sharp rattling noise made by their horns as they encountered each other.

"A mill!" said Jack.

"They're always at it," remarked Gunstock. "It's rather a pretty sight. See, that stag royal has hurt the other, and he cries ago."

It was so.

The largest of the two had lacerated the flank of his antagonist, who retired bleeding under a tree.

"Did you ever see them attack a man?" asked Jack.

"I fought with one for half-an-hour myself," replied the gamekeeper. "Fortunately I had my hunting-knife in my sheath, and I killed it at last, but I was cut about a good deal. They fight with their fore-legs as well as their horns."

Scarcely was the brief battle, which illustrated the ferocity of the stag, over, than they were startled by a cry.

Looking in the direction from whence it came they saw a very pretty girl about sixteen flying before a stag which was pursuing her.

Her hair and eyes were dark, and were set off by a red cloak, while the hue of

her complexion indicated her Bohemian origin.

"Help, help!" she exclaimed, adding some words in a foreign language which they did not understand.

Utterly regardless of the friendly warning which the keeper had given them, Jack Dashley rushed forward to the rescue.

He was an English boy, and could not see beauty in distress without doing something to relieve it.

The stag was gaining on the girl.

All at once she caught her foot in the root of the tree nearest her, and fell forward on her face with a despairing wail.

It seemed as if she was doomed to die.

The keeper raised his gun to his shoulder as if he would shoot the stag, but he dropped it again.

Jack was directly in the line of sight, and he could not fire without danger of hitting him.

Just as the stag was lowering his branching antlers to hyke the girl, Jack reached the spot and seized his horns.

A terrible struggle now ensued, and strong though Jack undoubtedly was, the issue of the combat could not have long been doubtful, for the deer frequently raised him off his feet.

Owen Tudor was about to go to his friend's assistance.

Seeing his intention, the keeper cried—

"Stand back!"

Raising his gun again he took unerring aim.

The bullet sped on its way, and the noble animal bit the dust.

The practised eye and cool hand of Gunstock had done the work well, and the peril was past.

It is true that one of the finest stags in the Queen's broad domain of Windsor had been sacrificed, but the venison larder would be the richer.

Jack assisted the girl to rise, and she smiled her thanks.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"Not at all; only frightened," she replied; "and I thank you so much."

"Your thanks are due to Gunstock as much as to me," said Jack.

She spoke with a slight foreign accent, rolling her *r*'s in a pretty way, which made her speech infinitely attractive.

The gamekeeper drew his hunting-knife from the sheath, and with a dexterous slashing movement cut the stag's throat.

"Soh!" he exclaimed; "it is a fine beast."

Then he looked at the girl, and frowned darkly.

"You are one of the Russian gipsies, if I am not mistaken, eh?" he demanded, roughly.

"Yes, sir. My name is Effie, and I am a gipsy," she replied.

"What are you prowling about here for?"

"I quitted the camp and strolled about to take a look at the beautiful park, sir."

"If I had my way I'd march you out of it precious quick."

"We don't do any harm, sir, and I will tell your fortune for nothing, if you like," said Effie.

"Go along! I don't believe in such juggling. You are all impostors and cheats. What do you know about the future?"

"More than you think, sir."

Effie's dark eyes flashed with indignant fire, which showed that she was incensed at the insult he had levelled at her tribe.

"Tell me something."

"You won't like to hear it; but I will tell you. Your hours are numbered."

"What do you mean by that?"

He turned pale in spite of his blustering manner.

"Simply that you have not long to live. The hand of death is hovering over you now. It is invisible to your eyes, but it is given to the poor despised gipsy to see these things."

There was an awful pause, no one daring to speak.

Rousing himself from the shock which the prediction had given him, Gunstock uttered an oath.

"It's a lie!" he thundered. "Get you gone or, girl though you are, I'll lay a switch across your shoulders."

The girl turned away, after bestowing a look of gratitude upon Jack Dashley, and entering the glade, was speedily lost to sight among the trees.

"Hang them all for rogues and vagabonds!" said the gamekeeper.

"That was a cheerful prophecy she made about you," remarked Jack.

"Pooh! All stuff and nonsense," laughed Gunstock.

"I'd go home and make my will if I were you."

"Bah! It was only malice to try and frighten me. Will, indeed; I've nothing to leave, and only myself to care for. She's off to the camp. Their tents are over there, half-way between here and the statue at the end of the Long Walk, on the Datchet side of the park. They hate me."

The boys wished him good day, leaving him to skin, cut up, and quarter the stag.

"Let's go and see the gipsies," exclaimed Jack. "I like that girl. She's awfully pretty. Wouldn't it be nice to have a kiss?"

"She wouldn't give you one," replied Owen.

"I'll bet she'd kiss me," said Bill Bragg. "All the time she was talking to Gunstock I saw her look at me."

The other boys burst out laughing at this.

"It's well to have a good opinion of yourself," remarked Owen Tudor.

"Oh, it's a way I've got," answered Bragg. "I can't go to an evening party without all the girls wanting to dance with me. So, as a rule, I don't dance at all, because I hate to make the little dears jealous."

It was impossible to take down Bill Bragg's self-confidence, so they walked on in silence.

They were full of youthful spirits and health, enjoying hugely their walk in the lovely park.

Ten minutes brought them in sight of the gipsies' camp, which was picturesquely situated on the gently sloping side of a small hill, backed by a dense clump of trees.

It consisted of fifteen tents or thereabouts, which housed about thirty of the Zingari.

They had, in addition, three travelling caravans, and as many ponies, the latter grazing close by.

Approaching the camp, they attracted the attention of a tall hirsute man of Herculean frame, and apparently prodigious strength.

No sooner did he see them than he shouted—

"Go back! We allow no strangers to spy around here."

"I've as much right here as you have," responded Jack, and "I shan't go back."

"Won't you?"

"No, that I won't," Jack said resolutely.

"Then I'll see if I can't make you," cried the gipsy, who cracked in the air a heavy dog-whip he carried in his right hand.

When Owen Tudor and Bill Bragg saw the whip, they took to their heels and ran away as fast as their legs could carry them, for they had no relish for a beating.

Not so Jack Dashley.

His blood was up, and he intended to defy the gipsy.

Walking boldly up to him, he looked the bearded Russian in the face without flinching.

"I'm an English boy, you Russian hound!" he said. "I have done nothing to you, and if you dare to touch me, I will summon you for an assault, and have you sent to prison, and your gang broken up."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the gipsy.

"Here's a little bantam cock."

"And you are a big overgrown bully—perhaps something worse."

The gipsy seized Jack by the collar, and raised his whip as if about to strike.

Hearing the altercation, several members of the tribe had collected to see what was going on.

Amongst these was Effie, who no sooner caught sight of Jack Dashley than she ran forward with extended arms, as the cruel heavy-looking whip was about to descend upon the boy's defenceless shoulders.

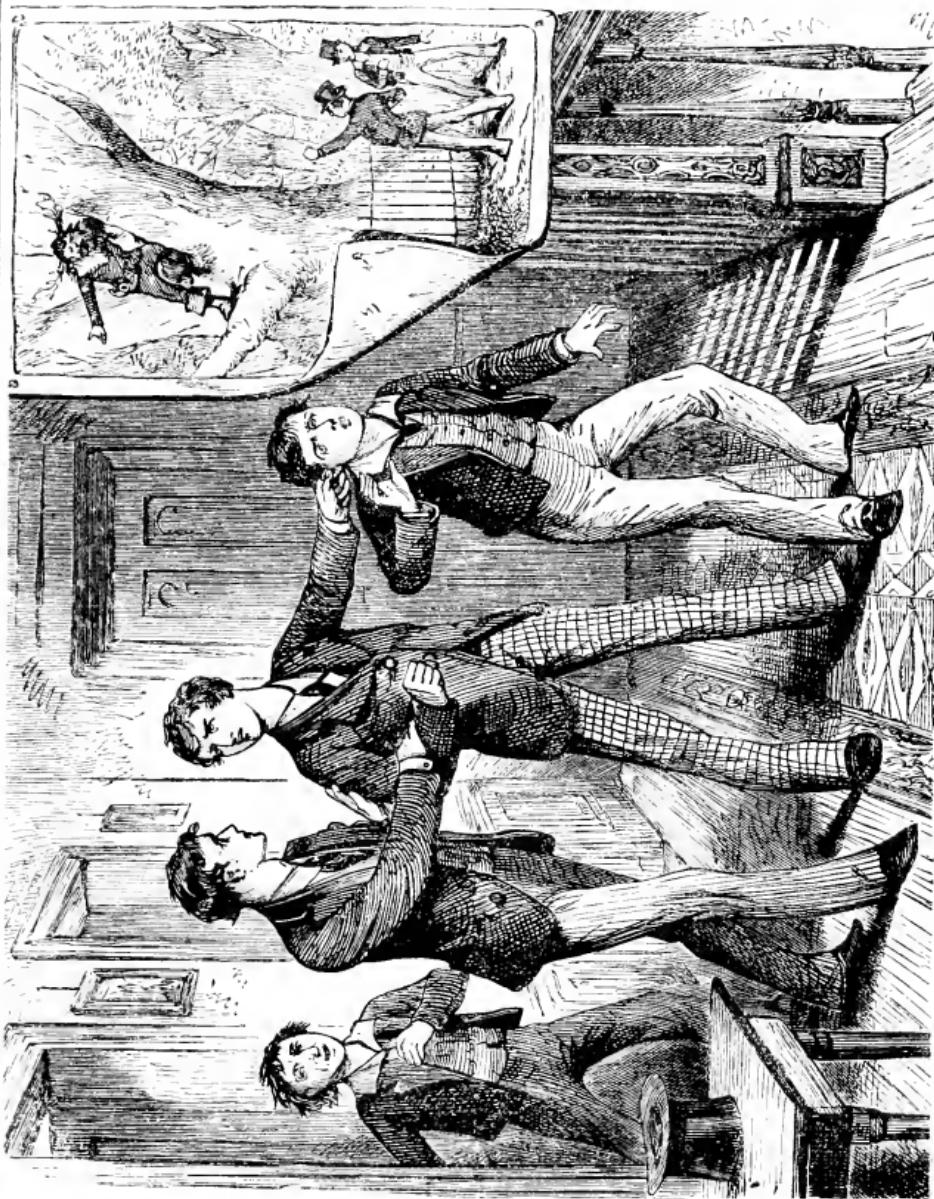
"Ivan!" she exclaimed; "stay your hand! Strike him not."

He scowled at her angrily, as if he did not like to be interrupted, and showed that he was a man of ungovernable passions, dangerous when aroused.

"What do you interfere for?" he asked fiercely.

"This is the boy who saved me from the horns of the stag."

"Ha, is it so?" said Ivan, releasing Jack. "Then he is welcome to the camp of the Zingari. Your hand."



"LET HIM GO. YOU DON'T WANT TO QUARREL WITH ME, DO YOU?" CRIED TIMOR."



Jack was not a boy to bear malice, and he held out his hand, which the stalwart gipsy grasped with a grip that made him wince, and brought the tears to his eyes.

"Hold on! you hurt a fellow," cried Jack. "However, I suppose you mean well."

"You are a friend of the tribe," replied Ivan, "for you have saved the life of our little sunbeam—the brightest jewel we have. Give him to drink and to eat, Effie. Let him break our bread and taste our salt."

Saying this, the gipsy stalked away, and throwing himself down in the ferns, lighted a pipe, which he proceeded to smoke with that listless apathy so peculiar to the wandering children of the moon.

The others resumed their occupations, or dived into their tents, and Jack was left alone with Effie.

"I am so glad I had an opportunity of being of service to you," said Effie.

"I have no cause to regret it," replied Jack, "for Ivan seems a terrible fellow, and a hiding with that whip of his would be no joke."

"He is very proud," replied Effie, "and cannot bear being contradicted. In Russia he has rich and titled connections. Even in this country there is one great personage who protects him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. His brother is a great man, and his father was a Tartar prince. But you will taste our fare?"

"No, thank you. I must hurry home."

"What are you, and what is your name?"

"Call me Jack. I am at Eton—the big college over there. You can see the spires in the distance across the river."

"Jack of Eton," said Effie, "you must come and see me again. I will work you something very pretty in beads and velvet."

"Thank you. I'd rather have one kiss."

Effie blushed deeply.

"Take it," she replied. "You saved my life at the risk of your own, and it is your right."

Jack gallantly put his arm round her waist and delicately kissed her cheek.

"Is Ivan your father?" he asked.

"No. I never knew my mother and father. I am the foundling of the tribe, though I always think Ivan knows more about my parentage than he will tell me."

"You are the child of mystery."

"And you are Jack of Eton," she said, smiling.

Jack looked at his watch, and found that it was time to be thinking of getting home.

"Good-bye, Effie dear," he exclaimed. "I will come again soon."

"Mind you do, Jack of Eton," answered Effie, simply. "There will be one who will look for you."

They pressed one another's hands, and bestowing an affectionate glance at this wild flower of the woods, Jack hastened away.

"That's my girl," he remarked to himself, as he hurried over the short, soft grass. "I wouldn't wish for a better sweetheart. pity she's a gipsy. How funny of her to call me Jack of Eton. That name will stick to me. She pronounced it, too, Jackoveton, as if I was a Russian like herself."

He could see nothing of Owen Tudor and Bill Bragg, who had probably gone home.

He did not blame them for running away, but he laughed at Bragg, who had said that he was not afraid of gipsies.

He was beginning to see that Bragg was an arrant boaster and a coward, full of talk, but empty of fighting, yet, though he despised such a character, he found him amusing.

It was not easy to find his way out of the mazes of Windsor Park.

He had gone some distance, and while he was halting and deliberating as to the best course to pursue, he found himself in front of a large tree, which was surrounded by an iron paling.

Its dried and withered branches, its gnarled trunk and broken limbs, showed that it had been dead for many years.

An inscription told him that it was Herne's oak.

A noise as of someone behind him made him turn round, and the sight he beheld nearly froze the blood in his veins.

A tall, fiendish-looking man, dressed in ill-fitting garments made of deerskin, hatless, but having his head surmounted

by a set of stag's horns, which appeared to grow out of his forehead, his long black hair flying in the wind, stood gazing at him.

His eyes were like coals of fire, and the expression of his face ferocious in the extreme.

"Who are you?" asked Jack, as soon as he had recovered from the start which the sudden apparition of this singular being had given him.

"Herne the Hunter," was the reply.

"He's been dead years ago," said Jack.

A peal of wild fiendish laughter rang through the crisp morning air.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Herne the Hunter can never die!" exclaimed the being in sepulchral tones.

Jack did not hesitate a moment, but bracing himself for an encounter, he made a dash at the apparition.

Herne cleverly eluded Jack's grasp, and springing lightly over the iron railings, vaulted into the blasted oak.

He climbed into the centre as nimbly as a monkey.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

This mocking cry grated harshly on Jack's ear again.

The next moment the fantastic form had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed it up.

Rubbing his eyes with astonishment, Jack Dashley began to doubt the evidence of his senses.

He could not credit the idea of the creature being a spirit, but if it was not a spirit, what was it?

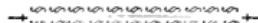
Where had it gone to?

There was no time to make further investigations, and it being already half-past one, he again started towards Windsor.

This time he was lucky in striking the Long Walk, and when he got out of the park he ran down the High Street into Eton, and reached his tutor's in time to wash his hands and brush his hair for dinner.

He was thoroughly bewildered by the events of the day.

Windsor Great Park had been full of exciting scenes and strange occurrences.



CHAPTER V.

TOWN AND GOWN.

JACK DASHLEY did not fail to relate all the wonderful things he had seen to his schoolfellows, but though they believed all he said about the gipsies, they laughed at his meeting with Herne the Hunter.

The gossip of the lower boys generally reached the upper boys, and in due time Timor and Funnybird Major heard of it.

One morning at fagging, Timor exclaimed—

"What did the gipsies do to you, Dashley?"

"Nothing much," replied Jack. "There was a Russian named Ivan who was going to lick me for cheeking him, but a girl saved me."

"Afraid of a Russian, and saved by a girl," sneered Timor.

Jack went on making the tea, and made no answer.

"What did you say to this terrible gipsy?" continued Timor.

"I told him he was a Russian hound," replied Jack.

"It would have served you right if he had broken every bone in your body," exclaimed Timor. "What is the difference between a Russian and an Englishman?"

"One's a savage and the other's civilised."

Funnybird laughed at this.

"I don't think you will get much the best of Dashley," he observed. "Take my advice and drop the subject. I say, Dashley, what about Herne the Hunter?"

"Oh, that's some infernal lie of his," growled Timor.

"No it isn't," exclaimed Jack. "I saw him distinctly and talked with him. He had horns on his head and looked awful."

"What became of him?" asked Funnybird.

"He jumped into the old tree they call Herne's oak and disappeared."

Timor laughed incredulously.

"You can tell that to the marines," he said.

"It's true."

"You might as well tell me that the sky rains larks and ask me to believe it."

"You daren't come to the tree and look for him," said Jack.

Timor got up and extended his big arms.

"Daren't I?" he answered. "Wait till the next whole holiday, and I'll go with you in the afternoon. Funnybird shall come with us, and I'll show you whether I am afraid or not."

"We shan't be able to go this week," said Funnybird Major.

"Why not?"

"Thursday is the only whole holiday, and that is election day."

"Ah! so it is. Our fellows have been told not to make a row, haven't they?" replied Timor.

"Yes," said Funnybird. "A bad feeling exists between the Eton boys and the townspeople of Windsor. We had a row last election day, and there was a fight on the castle hill on the 5th of November."

"Of course I remember," replied Timor. "I was away on leave at the time, staying with my father at the embassy."

"I hear that the head-master has sent a notice to all captains of houses."

"What about?"

"To caution the Eton boys against making any disturbance. But here is Careless; he will tell us all about it."

At this juncture Careless, the captain of the house, entered the room and held up a paper.

"I say, you fellows," he exclaimed, "Doctor Goodford has sent word that we are to be very careful on election day, that is next Thursday. All the fellows will go up town after four, I suppose, but they are not to irritate the townspeople."

"Who cares for the town?" said Funnybird.

"Well, none of us do much," answered Careless.

"We've licked them before and we can do it again."

"Of course. I only give you the headmaster's orders. It is no further business of mine. I don't care so long as we are not confined to college. For

my part I'd like to see a row with the town."

"We should lick them into fits," observed Timor. "I shall go in for it."

"All right. I have done my duty," said Careless.

He went away to caution the other boys in the house, but he did not seem particularly zealous.

The fact was that the town had not been very civil to the Eton boys on various occasions recently.

On the 5th of November in the last year there was a fair, as there is every year in Bachelor's Acre in Windsor, and the townspeople had provoked a fight by attacking with overwhelming numbers quite a small crowd of collegians.

It was felt that election day would offer an opportunity for revenge, and that was why the provost, the fellows, the head-master and assistant-masters had taken sweet counsel together, the result being the issue of the general order to which Careless had alluded.

"By Jove!" said Funnybird Major, "won't we have a jolly lark!"

"I'll take my knout with me," exclaimed Timor, "and warm the town."

Jack was thinking more of Herne the Hunter.

"You won't forget your engagement to hunt up Herne at the oak with me?" he remarked.

"No," replied Timor; "that holds good the first chance we get, and I should like to see these gipsies too."

"We can do both," answered Jack. "Ivan is a demon, but you would like my Little Red-riding Hood, Effie. Do you want anything for breakfast this morning?"

"No, you can go; so step it."

Jack and Owen sat down to their own breakfast, and talked about the election.

They had settled down to their work, and felt themselves to be thorough Etonians, consequently anything concerning the honour of the school interested them.

If the townspeople had insulted the school, the town ought to be punished at the first opportunity.

This was only strict partial justice.

Even Herne the Hunter and the gipsies were forgotten in the excitement caused by a public conflict on the day of election.

Mr. Bonar, a rich landowner in the neighbourhood, was the Conservative candidate, and he was the general favourite with the boys.

His colour was blue, and quite a quantity of blue ribbon was purchased to be put in button-holes.

Mr. Potts, the Liberal, had also many supporters.

His colour was yellow. He was a gentleman from London with advanced radical views, and he was the darling of the town.

This fact alone was enough to make the Etonians go wild over Bonar, and wherever Potts' name was mentioned it was received with groans.

Jack, Owen Tudor, and Bragg arranged to go up to town together on election day.

They had rosettes of the ribbon pinned on their jackets, but they did not carry any sticks, as they intended to depend entirely on their fists.

Bragg was sitting on the table in Jack's room, swinging his legs.

Owen Tudor sat in the easy-chair, and Jack poked the fire.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Bragg, "if there's a row, I mean to come out strong."

"So do I," replied Jack, who was delighted at the idea. "I certainly mean to let them have it hot."

"You are new fellows, and don't know what a town and gown fight is," pursued Bragg with that air of superiority which long residence always gives a boy.

"Why do they call us gown?" inquired Owen.

"Because we have seventy scholars on the foundation who wear gowns; we are the oppidans, but still they call us all gowns."

"Were you out in the Guy Fawkes' riot?" asked Jack.

"Wasn't I? We got badly licked that time, because we were not organised. I did nearly all the fighting in Bachelor's Acre, and I saw these fellows I had mauled carried to the hospital on a stretcher; one I believe never recovered."

"The sight of you will be enough for the mob."

"It will. They all run when they see me. There's a young butcher named Martin Fenwick, who leads the water-side gang; he swore to have my life.

Let me meet him, that's all. I'll ——"

Bragg got off the table and executed a war-dance, and sparred wildly at nothing in particular.

"By Jove!" he added, in tragic language; "I'll welter in his gore."

Jack and Owen laughed at this demonstration, for they firmly believed that Bragg would not show fight at all.

When the day came the Etonians, after four o'clock, might have been seen wending their way up town in twos, and threes, and fours.

Most of them wore the blue ribbon, and they stepped along with an air of determination as if they expected a struggle, and were prepared for it.

The hustings were erected in the market-place, at the top of the Castle Hill, in front of the town hall.

A great crowd had assembled here, which swayed to and fro.

Just as Jack and his two friends arrived at this spot a placard was hoisted.

"Result of the Poll, four o'clock—Bonar, 3,564; Potts, 3,560."

"Hurrah for Bonar!" exclaimed Jack, taking off his hat.

"What are you hollaoing for, young Greek and Latin?" asked a big youth near him.

"Do you want to know?" replied Jack.

"If I didn't, I shouldn't ax."

"Then ax and find out."

Bragg touched Jack on the arm.

"That is the young butcher," he whispered; "Martin Fenwick. I fixed my eye on him, and saw him quail. We must fight as long as we can. I'll go down the hill and bring up reinforcements."

"Going to leave us?"

"Only for a few moments. I'm a prudent general. Must have supports, pitch in and give it them hot and strong," replied Bragg.

Jack had no time to say anything more, for the young butcher pushed his way towards him.

Of course the declaration of the poll did not truly give the result of the election, as all the votes had not yet been counted, but it foreshadowed it.

The Conservative was ahead, and the "town" did not like it.

Fenwick stretched out his hand and knocked Jack's hat off with an insolent laugh.

"You're my mutton," he exclaimed. "Can you fight?"

"You'll see directly," answered Jack.

"Slip in," said Owen. "I'm with you, Jack."

"Right you are. Come on, mutton-head, there's one for your cheek."

The next moment the butcher had received a heavy blow in the mouth which cut his lips and made all his teeth rattle like castanets.

"How do you like that?" asked Jack. "There's another to keep it company."

The butcher, in nowise daunted, spared up to Jack and struck him.

This was the beginning of the riot.

It was like the dropping of a lighted match in a field of dry flax.

"Town! town!" roared Fenwick, with the energy of a young bull.

"Gown! gown! Eton to the rescue!" shouted Owen Tudor.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when he was knocked down.

But he was up again in a moment and fighting bravely like a true Welshman.

Jack had half-a-dozen on to him, and he and Owen were obliged to retreat down the hill.

When outside the "Castle Inn," they were reinforced by a dozen collegians, and kept the mob at bay.

The fight had become general all over the market-place, for wherever there was an Etonian the roughs of Windsor attacked him.

Careless, as well as being captain of Mr. Dryasdust's house, was also captain of the school, and he was in the crowd.

Many of the Etonians had not yet come up from college, and those who had arrived at the scene of action were mostly scattered.

Seeing this, Careless, who was a strong, tall, powerful fellow, determined to rally his forces.

"Give 'em 5th of November!" shouted a townsman. "They're only a lot of guys!"

Careless gave him a blow which sent him to count the number of stones in the road, saying—

"There's a clinker on the jaw for you!" and mounted a costermonger's

barrow, which made him tower above the crowd.

"Stick together, gown!" he cried, in a voice which was heard above the din. "Retreat down the hill — steady — shoulder to shoulder!"

It was not easy to obey this mandate, for many boys were tightly wedged in the crowd, and were unable to get out.

Many of them got badly knocked about and had to undergo considerable punishment before they could extricate themselves.

At length about a couple of hundred formed a solid platoon and presented a bold front to the enemy.

But they were unable to stand long.

The roughs poured down upon them like an avalanche, outnumbering the schoolboys by at least two to one.

The Etonians broke and ran, but formed again near the bridge, which they held gallantly, like Horatius of old, immortalised in Macaulay's verse.

They knew that others would soon come up from the college.

Jack and Owen Tudor were pressed down a small street which led to the river by the butcher and half-a-dozen of his companions.

"Now we've got 'em!" cried Martin Fenwick. "I hate schoolboys, and we'll duck 'em in the river."

"Put your back against the wall, Owen," said Jack. "Shoulder to shoulder, and let them have it."

They stood side by side and fought seven of the town, knocking them about like ninepins, but receiving some ugly blows in return.

The young butcher showed plenty of dogged pluck, and so did his friends.

Jack and Owen, however, had more science, and they could not be driven from the wall.

"It's no good, Martin," exclaimed one, "we can't move 'em. They be fixtures, and their 'eds are so plaguey hard. I'm 'urting my knuckles."

Martin Fenwick was obstinate.

He had determined to duck the schoolboys, and he would not give up the idea.

The unequal fight continued to rage.

Suddenly they heard a cry of—

"Eton to the rescue! Gown! gown!"

A score of Etonians, led by Bill Bragg, were seen coming down the street, and

the town gave up the fight, running away.

"Hurrah!" cried Bragg. "I saw you go down this street, and I just got a few of the boys together. Where's that butcher of mine? My hand itches to give him a dose from my bunch of fives. Bring him out. Why, here I am slap-bang and all alive, and hang me if he hasn't cut and run."

He looked round defiantly.

"I knew how it would be," he continued; "directly he saw me he fled. These town eads can't stand me."

"How's the fight going up the street?" asked Jack.

"We're holding the bridge, and a scout came up to say that Sutherland had roused the whole school."

"That's good news."

"Oh, yes; we shall make it hot for them before long."

"Let us go back and help as much as we can," exclaimed Jack, wiping the blood from his nose.

"Certainly. You fellows go back," replied Bragg. "I'll follow in a minute, slap-bang and all alive, but I can't allow that butcher fellow to escape me, after I've been looking for him ever since the 5th of November last."

The other boys returned to help their comrades, and Bill Bragg waited till they were out of sight, when he turned into a small ale-house.

There was no one in the private bar.

He knew the landlord, who said—

"So there is a disturbance in the town, sir?"

"Yes, Taps," replied Bragg. "I've been fighting like a Trojan."

"Just like you, Mr. Bragg. I suppose you want some beer after your exertions?"

"You've hit the nail on the head. That's just what I do want. Our fellows are holding the bridge."

"Indeed!"

"I came down here not so much for the beer as to lick Martin Fenwick the butcher. He's a skulking bound. The fellow no sooner sees me than he bolts. Oh, if I could only get him to stand up like a man. Slap-bang and all alive."

He began his favourite pantomime of sparring at nobody.

The door opened and in walked Fenwick, who had taken refuge in the next

compartment, and overheard Mr. Bragg's uncomplimentary remarks regarding himself.

Bragg stopped dancing, and putting his hands in his pockets began to whistle.

"I think I heard you mention my name?" said the butcher.

"Hum! yes," replied Bragg, "I was inquiring for you. I know you use this house occasionally."

"Well?"

"The last time I was up town I bought some chops at your shop on tick, you know, and the fact is I was anxious to pay for them. Only a couple of bob."

"Indeed!"

"I'm straightforward always. Slap-bang and all alive!"

He handed him the two shillings, which the butcher put in his pocket with a sly chuckle.

"Don't you want a receipt?" he asked.

"Oh, no. Not the slightest necessity for that sort of thing between gentlemen, you know," replied Bragg.

"I think I'd best give you one. Suppose you take a slap in the eye and carry the receipt about with you?"

"Eh—what?"

"It's business. Where will you have it? Right or left?"

Before Bragg could answer, the warlike butcher struck him a blow in the eye which made him measure his length on the floor.

"That's to remember the cowardly hound by," he exclaimed, as he walked away and banged the door behind him.

Bill Bragg picked himself up and shook off the sawdust which had gathered on his clothes.

The blow was a severe one and his eye began to swell rapidly, making black blood in the veins.

"Are you hurt, sir?" asked the landlord, who could scarcely conceal his merriment.

"Oh, no; playful dog that," replied Bragg; "full of his nonsense. We always skylark like that when we meet."

"You don't seem to mind it."

"Not in the least. Do the same thing to him next time. It's only his way. There isn't a better fellow really in Windsor. Slap-bang and all alive, that's my motto. Good-day. I mustn't waste any more time. Got to go and help the gown, you know."

Rubbing his injured eye, the irrepressible Bragg left the house and made his way cautiously up the street.

He had spoken incautiously, but he flattered himself that he had thrown dust in the eyes of the landlord.

The fight was waxing fast and furious at the bridge.

Hundreds of Etonians were hurrying up from college, and the town was giving way.

Bragg saw Jack and Owen Tudor charging the crowd, and he joined them, taking care to keep behind them.

"Peg away!" he exclaimed; "I've just licked the butcher; awful hard mill; he gave me a lovely black eye, but I polished him off. Slap-bang and all alive! Holloa! that's a stunner. Who hit me?"

Someone had dealt him a blow which made him see stars, and he went to the rear to bring up more reinforcements, as he said.

The town now broke, and the gown pursued them up the hill with a ringing cheer.

The onslaught of the Etonians was irresistible.

Nothing could withstand it, and though the town made a final stand in the market-place, it was clear that they were getting the worst of it.

A platoon of police now appeared on the scene, but they were powerless to enforce order, and the Mayor of Windsor sent for the military.

Two companies of the Grenadier Guards were ordered out of the Sheet Street Barracks, and marched up Peascod Street to the scene of action.

The mayor, in great trepidation, stood on the hustings and read the Riot Act, but someone threw a diseased turnip at him and hit him on the nose.

He fell back into the arms of the town clerk, who received a rotten egg in the eye.

"Bless me!" said the mayor; "this is dreadful."

"Awful!" remarked the clerk. "But you've got the best of it, they rotten-egged me."

The officer in command of the Guards marched them straight between the two rows of combatants, and caused them to face about and back in the market-place.

"Boys!" he exclaimed; "go back to college. If you don't, I'll drive you there at the point of the bayonet, by Jove! I'm an old Etonian myself, but order must be preserved."

Careless stepped forward boldly.

"Send the cads home first," he replied, "and I'll answer for it we'll disperse quietly."

The officer took the hint, and ordered the rank facing the Windsor end of the street to fix bayonets.

"They did so, and he gave the word "Charge!"

The townsmen did not wait for the onset of the soldiers.

They ran in all directions, and the square was soon cleared.

Then Careless led the way back to the college.

The Etonians formed themselves into rows, linking their arms, and, taking up the whole length of the street, drove everything before them, even a dog or a horse and cart being obliged to get out of their way.

If their triumph was not complete they at least had something to boast of, for they had driven the town all the way from the bridge to the market-place.

Bruised faces and black eyes were the order of the day, but there were no bones broken.

So ended the memorable fight on election day, of which Etonians are proud up to this time.

CHAPTER VI.

TIMOR'S ADVENTURE IN THE PARK.

THE election riot was very soon forgotten.

As nearly the whole school was concerned in it, the head-master could not

select a few to punish as ringleaders, making them scapegoats, so the affair passed over.

Bragg made a great deal of capital

out of his black eye, and took no end of "kudos" to himself.

If he was to be believed, he had done all the fighting, and the school would have been badly beaten had it not been for him.

Jack Dashley did not omit to remind Timor of the promise he had made to come into Windsor Great Park and investigate the mystery connected with the strange being who called himself Herne the Hunter.

The first holiday afternoon was selected for their journey, and they started for Windsor, but not together.

Timor was a fifth form boy, and very proud.

"I can't be seen walking up town, you know, with a lower boy," he said.

"Why not?" asked Jack.

"Oh, it's bad form. You cut up first, and I'll meet you in the billiard-room at the 'White Hart.'

"I'm as good as you," said Jack.

"That is certainly a matter of opinion."

"Don't you think I am?"

"Candidly, I do not," replied the haughty Russian.

"All right. Then you can go by yourself," Jack said, independently.

"Where's my knout?" cried Timor. "I can't stand being cheeked for a moment by a lower boy, and my own fag, too."

"You beastly Russian bully," said Jack.

"I'll lick you more for that than anything," replied Timor. "Confound it! where did I put that knout?"

"If you hit me, Timor," exclaimed Jack, "I'll fight you as long as I can stand."

"You will?"

"Yes; and then I'll holloa, so that the captain of the house will come and put a stop to your bullying."

Timor had found his twisted knotted rope, and was swinging it in the air; but, deterred by Dashley's threat, he did not offer to touch him.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"Of course I do. What do you take me for—a fool?"

"Look here," said Timor, "I don't want to have any row with you. Cut along, as I told you."

"I won't. If I am not good enough

to walk up town with you, I am too far beneath you to walk in the park."

"But consider the difference in our position. Who are you compared with me?"

"The son of an English gentleman—a professional man—and one well respected in his position."

"My father is connected with the Russian Embassy, and he is a prince in his own country. We have centuries of good blood in our veins. In fact, we can date back before the foundation of the Russian empire. The Timors were counts before the time of Peter the Great."

"I don't care a straw," answered Jack. "We go together, or we don't go at all."

"Look here," said Timor, with increased insolence, "if you were in Russia, I should not consider you good enough to black my boots."

"That ends it."

"In fact, I should have you well flogged, and then sent in chains to work for the rest of your life in the mines of Siberia."

"Would you? Go and find Herne for yourself. You are not in Russia now, so don't try any of your Russian games on me or you'll find an English boy won't stand them."

Timor paced the room impatiently; he wanted to undertake the adventure he had proposed, and show Jack that he was not afraid of anything, but he required him as a guide.

"Well," he said, "I'll do it this once. Come along. It grates upon me, for I shall feel as if I was walking on the banks of the Neva in St. Petersburg with a poor relatiou."

"Have you no poor relations?" asked Jack.

"Oh, dear no; my family are awfully rich. We have no one in our circle that we need be ashamed of; but let us start," answered Timor.

They quitted the house together, and proceeded to the park.

"You want to see the gipsies first, don't you?" asked Jack.

"Yes; I'll bet they are impostors. They call themselves Russians, but I'll soon find out, for I am not to be made a fool of easily. I know my own countrymen."

Jack led the way towards the gipsies' camp.

The tents were still in the same position, and it seemed as if the Zingari intended to make a long stay there.

Ivan was standing in front of a tent, reading a letter.

"That is the chief," said Jack.

"Oh, is it? I'll speak to him," answered Timor. "How are you, old man?"

Ivan looked up and regarded him with attention.

"Ha!" he cried. "I think we have met before."

"What?" cried Timor.

"I cannot be mistaken. You are Timor Petroskowitch, and I am Ivan your uncle."

"Good heavens," said Timor, "is it possible that I find you here, the leader of a band of gipsies?"

After what he had said to Jack Dashley, he felt the degradation keenly.

"Yes; I am in disfavour with the Czar. I cannot say anything more now. What brings you here?"

"Curiosity, uncle, that is all."

"Salute me as a relative should," continued Ivan. "Am I not a Petroskowitch and a chief of the Tartars?"

Timor sank on one knee, and raising the gipsy's hand to his lips, kissed it respectfully.

If Jack Dashley had not been present and seen his humiliation, he would not have cared.

As it was, his pride had had such a fall that he was ready to sink into the ground.

Jack Dashley was not only surprised but amused at the position in which the proud Russian found himself, for after boasting of his wealthy and important connections it was a great fall for his pride to have to acknowledge a gipsy as his uncle.

He looked round for Effie, but did not see her anywhere.

While he was searching with his eyes among the tents, Timor rejoined him.

"Come," he said, "let us get away from here."

"I am ready," replied Jack. "But I should have liked you to see my little girl. She is so pretty and nice."

"Another time," exclaimed Timor, impatiently.

They strode rapidly away, Timor walking so fast that Jack could scarcely keep up with him.

He was a great smoker of cigarettes, and lighted one as if he wished to soothe his nervous system.

"Jack," he said, in a more kindly tone, "do you want any money?"

"As it happens I do not," answered Jack. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I am rich, and I will always give you all the tin you require if you will not tell the other fellows about that gipsy being my uncle."

"I shall reserve to myself the right to talk if I like."

Timor turned fiercely upon him, and Jack, clutching his fists, stood upon his guard.

Timor scowled at Jack for a moment, and then fiercely exclaimed—

"If you do tell, I'll lick you."

"That won't make any difference when the thing is done, for I shall hit back. However, you be my friend, and I'll be yours."

Timor was obliged to be satisfied with this undertaking, and continued his walk in moody silence.

He found that Jack could neither be bribed nor threatened, and he wished fifty times over that his curiosity had not led him into the forest. It would be hard to bear if the boys knew all, and called him gipsy.

He was not a popular character; his bullying propensities had made him many enemies, and if the boys once began to chaff him, he could not fight the whole school.

Half-an-hour's walk brought them to Herne's oak, and by this time Timor had partially recovered his serenity.

"Is this the tree where you saw Herne disappear?" he inquired.

"It is where I saw the creature I took to be Herne the Hunter," Jack replied.

Timor regarded the old tree curiously, and his eyes travelled along its withered branches, which displayed no sign of life, vegetable or animal.

"You must have been dreaming," he continued. "Are you subject to delusions?"

"Not in the least. My head was never more clear than it was on that occasion, though I admit I was startled."

"If I had seen the creature I'd have

followed it and soon found out whether it was a spirit or not, but of course it could not be a spirit—ghosts are an exploded idea."

At this moment the weird spectral laughter, which had so startled Jack, was heard.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Timor started, and felt the blood in his veins turn cold.

"Malediction!" he cried; "someone is mocking me."

"It is Herne," replied Jack.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the spirit.

"Let us turn back," continued Jack. "There is something so canny, as the Scots say, about this."

"I'll be shot if I do," said Timor. "You shall never say that a Russian was a coward."

"Nor am I, as far as that goes," Jack returned. "But we can see nothing, and if we do, the thing disappears like a will-o'-the-wisp or the jack-o'-lantern."

"It is some trick. Ha! there it is! Good Heaven! It is just like the description I have always heard of Herne the Hunter."

In fact the same strange creature, dressed in deerskins, and having the branching horns of a stag on its forehead, appeared in the tree.

"St. Nicholas defend us!" added Timor, crossing himself.

The spirit stood on a bough half-way up the tree, and shook its long skeletal arm at Timor.

Urged by an unmistakable impulse the latter sprang over the railings and darted to the foot of the tree.

"Come down," he exclaimed, "or I'll make you. Do you think I am going to stand here to be mocked by a false juggler like you?"

Herne beckoned to him to come up.

Showing no signs of fear, but only those of rage, the impatient Russian began to climb into the tree.

No sooner had he done so than Herne stretched out his hand, seized him by the collar as if he had been a child, and drew him up into the tree.

The next instant Timor uttered a cry which rang wildly through the forest, and both he and Herne disappeared together.

Jack Dashley rubbed his eyes as if he

could not believe the evidence of his senses.

In broad daylight, in the middle of the day, his schoolfellow had been spirited away, he knew not whither.

"By Jove," he muttered, "that's a corker. Where is he gone to? Timor—Timor!"

There was no answer.

The sound of his voice was returned to him in multitudinous echoes, resounding among the huge trees by which he was surrounded, and that was all.

Creeping cautiously up to the tree, Jack walked round it, kicking it with his feet.

It gave out a hollow cavernous sound, as if it was decayed.

Then he climbed into the branches, and to his surprise found a big hole leading into the trunk, the orifice being quite large enough for the body of a man to go through.

This seemed to afford him some slight explanation of the mystery.

It was possible that the strange apparition had dragged Timor down this hole, but for what purpose it was impossible to say.

Bending over the aperture he again called his missing companion by name, but as before he received no answer, though he fancied he heard a stifled cry proceeding from the unknown depths below.

While peering into the cavernous abyss a sudden flash of fire took place, which was followed by a dense sulphurous smoke, which half choked and blinded him.

"Bah!" he said. "It seems as if Old Nick and all his imps are down there burning sulphur."

He hastily beat a retreat and dropped on the ground, admitting to himself that it was useless to attempt anything more.

After a few moments' reflection he determined to hasten back to college and tell Mr. Dryasdust what had happened.

Probably if the college police were put on the track they would make an effort to rescue Timor, of which Jack by himself was not capable.

Getting out of the park into Old Windsor he made the best of his way into college, and on reaching the house inquired for his tutor, who he was informed would be found in the library.

Mr. Dryasdust was a very learned man.

It was admitted by all that he was one of the most accomplished Greek and Latin scholars that Eton had ever turned out, and at King's College, Cambridge, he had especially distinguished himself.

He was also a great antiquary, and for the last ten years he had been engaged in writing a book of research on Windsor Castle, its history and traditions.

This was his *magnum opus*, or great work.

It had taken up all his time for ten years, and involved great labour.

He expected to have it finished soon, and looked forward fondly to the time when it would be published and bring him fame if not fortune.

When Jack entered the cosy library in which he was writing, surrounded by piles of books for reference, he looked up kindly.

Though he did not talk much to the boys, several generations of scholars had regarded him with love and affection, for he was at all times just.

"Ah, Dashley," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"A most curious thing has happened, sir," replied Jack, holding his hat in his hand.

"Yes? Be seated. Take your time and don't be in a hurry. I can see you are a little excited."

"So would you be, sir. Timor and I went for a walk in Windsor Great Park, and we came to Herne's oak. Herne appeared to us in the tree, dressed in the traditional deerskins and horns. He laughed at us. Timor sprang into the tree. Herne seized him and they disappeared down a hollow in the tree."

Mr. Dryasdust adjusted his spectacles and looked fixedly at Jack.

"This is very remarkable," he said. "The legend of Herne the Hunter is a very old one. I have written much concerning him, and we have numerous well-authenticated instances of his appearance in the forest from time to time."

"Do you believe he is a spirit, sir?"

"He cannot very well be a man, as he has been dead for centuries. I fear some dreadful fate has overtaken Timor.

We must put the matter in the hands of the police, though I doubt if they can do anything."

"May it not be a trick of some designing person—some thief in league with the gypsies?"

"I know not. Windsor Castle is full of subterranean passages, spiral staircases in the walls, and sliding-panels. In the forest there are caves which are only known to the antiquary by old plans found in long disused books. Here," said Mr. Dryasdust, tapping a moth-eaten tome, "is a plan of an underground passage leading from the Curfew Tower to the banks of the river. I could tell you much that would interest you respecting the castle, but I have not time. When my book comes out, people will be astonished at what I shall disclose about this ancient fortress, now the favourite abode of royalty."

"Will you see the police, or I, sir?" asked Jack.

"We will walk up town together; all that can be done for Timor shall be effected without delay."

Mr. Dryasdust put on his hat and quitted the house with Jack, who was terribly impatient to have the mystery solved.

Scarcely had they got into the road, when they saw a boy approaching.

His coat was torn and covered with dust, his hat was gone, and his face was pale and haggard.

"Why, bless me," cried Mr. Dryasdust, "that is Timor. We are saved our trouble."

Timor on hearing his name pronounced looked up, and would have passed by without speaking, if his tutor had not stopped him.

"How did you escape from Herne the Hunter?" demanded Mr. Dryasdust; "we were just going to rouse the police in your behalf."

"Oh, it was all right, sir. I—I fell down a hole in the tree," he replied.

"Were you hurt?"

"Only a little shaken."

"But who was this singular being, habited in the garb of Herne, who dragged you down?"

"I saw nobody, sir," answered Timor, trying to laugh. "I see Dashley has been telling you something which exists only in his vivid imagination."

At this declaration, Jack was more astonished than ever.

What on earth could have induced Timor to tell such a palpable falsehood?

"You did not see Herne?"

"No, sir; I climbed into the tree for fun, slipped down the hole, and Dashley I suppose was frightened, for he left me to scramble out again the best way I could."

Mr. Dryasdust looked inquiringly at Jack.

"You must have deceived yourself," he exclaimed; "and in future I will thank you not to come to me with such absurd stories, though I must confess that my reading has inclined me to believe them."

"I'll swear that what I have told you, sir, is the truth," replied Jack.

"You must have been mistaken, or Timor would not be so positive. Run along with your friend now, and help him to make himself look decent."

Saying this in a somewhat severe tone, Mr. Dryasdust re-entered the house through a private door, and seeking his library, at once resumed the studies which Jack's arrival had so rudely interrupted.

"What do you mean by telling such a crammer?" he asked.

"Don't ask me any questions," replied Timor.

"Why not?"

"I'm bound to secrecy."

"Who was the fellow who pulled you down the tree, and where did you go?" continued Jack.

"I can't tell you, for I am under an oath," Timor said almost sadly; "that is all about it. I only wish to goodness I had never gone into the forest with you."

With this answer Jack was obliged to be content, for though he plied the Russian artfully with questions, he could extract absolutely nothing from him.

The mystery, whatever it was, deepened and became more and more impenetrable than ever.

Timor begged him to say nothing about their adventure, and he consented, as he saw that the boys would not believe him, if Timor persisted in his denial.

Not even to Owen Tudor did he mention about what had happened.

Going to his room he was surprised to find it in a state of confusion.

Everything was upset, chairs were piled upon the tables, books scattered about, the bed placed in the middle of the floor, pictures taken down and his clothes strewn in different directions.

Somebody during his absence had been engaged in the pleasing pastime known to school-boys as "making hay."

Much annoyed, he sought Owen's room, and found him talking to Bill Bragg, who was relating some marvellous adventure, in which he alleged he had taken part.

"Some fellow has made hay in my room," said Jack. "Have you seen anyone about?"

"Yes," replied Owen; "I saw Funnybird Minor come out of your diggings a little while ago, and thought he had been to borrow a book or something."

"I'll wring his neck!" said Jack angrily.

"You'd better look out. His brother messes with Timor, and he'll get you jolly well licked."

"No, he won't either; Timor daren't say anything to me."

At this declaration Owen looked greatly surprised.

"How did you manage to tame the Russian Bear?" he asked.

"Never you mind; I have tamed him."

"Oh," said Bragg, "Timor is a coward at heart; he can only talk. One day he taekled me, and I gave him as good as he sent, and since then he has let me alone."

"How was it?" asked Jack.

Bill Bragg was sitting before the fire in Owen's easy-chair, with his back to the door, which was open.

He could not see behind him, and consequently was not aware that Timor was standing on the threshold, but he was there.

He had come to look for a lower boy to fag up to the "Christopher" to get him a bottle of sherry, as he wanted a glass of wine after his mysterious and startling adventure in the forest.

The "Christopher" is the principal hotel in Eton, and has been shrined in the memories of many generations of Etonians.

It is here that the "men in the boats" meet after the great race of the

summer season and drink champagne cup in honour of the victors before they march down town in two rows to hoist the winners, all of which will in due time be portrayed in the course of our story.

When Timor heard his name mentioned, he smiled and winked one eye at Jack and Owen.

"You know," resumed Bragg, "that I'm always slap-bang and all alive. There is no nonsense about me."

"Not a bit," said Owen.

"Timor tried it on with me. One day he said, soon after I came here, 'Are you a lower boy?' 'What's that to you?' I replied. 'I want a fellow to cut up town,' he said. 'Go and get one,' I exclaimed. 'It isn't everybody who can fag me.'"

"What did he say to that?" asked Jack.

"Timor? Oh, he drew in his horns and said, 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Bragg. I didn't mean to offend you. Will you kindly send me the first lower boy you meet, and I shall be extremely obliged to you!'"

At this Timor could not restrain his mirth, and burst out into a loud fit of laughter.

Bill Bragg turned round uneasily.

"Something seems to have amused you fellows," he exclaimed. "By George, Timor!"

Then he too began to laugh.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed. "I knew you were there. I'm a sly dog—slap-bang and all alive!"

"So I should think," replied Timor.

"Oh, I may be a young man from the country, but you don't get over me."

"Will you go up to the 'Christopher' and get me a bottle of sherry? Tell them to put it down to my tick. I don't like to trust you with the money."

"Good joke that. Of course I'll go. Anything to oblige you, old boy. How do you like your tipple, sweet or dry?"

"Dry. Make haste. If you don't look sharp I'll get out my knout."

"No occasion for that. If there is one man in this house I like flogging for it is you—quite a pleasure, upon my word," said Bragg.

Timor retired, and Bragg put on his hat with a yawn.

"Deuced hard on a fellow when he's

comfortable before the fire," remarked Owen.

"Not at all," answered Bragg; "a rum before dinner will give me an appetite. I was thinking of taking a stroll. Ta, ta!"

He hurried off, mindful of the threat about the knout which Timor had made use of, and as he had tasted it on one occasion he rather fought shy of it.

"That fellow is like an eel," observed Owen. "No matter what fixes he gets himself into, he wriggles out of them again as easily as some fellows can do Latin verses."

A voice outside was heard saying "Ba-a-a!" and it made Owen colour up.

"That's Funnybird Minor doing the goat," he said. "He can't let us alone."

"It reminds me that I owe him a licking," replied Jack, rushing out of the door.

They caught Funnybird in the passage, and Jack, seizing him by the arm, gave him a box on the ears.

"I'll teach you to make hay in my room," he cried.

"I didn't, and you can't prove it," replied Funnybird Minor.

"Yes, you did. Tudor saw you come out. Take that!"

He hit him again, this time harder than before.

"I'll tell my major," he exclaimed.

"I don't care who you tell."

Owen gave him a kick.

"That's for the goat," he remarked.

Funnybird wrenched himself from them, and ran to his brother's room crying for help, and his brother, followed by Timor, came out.

"What's the row?" he demanded.

"Dashley's licking me because he says I made hay in his room, and I told him you wouldn't let him."

Funnybird seized hold of Jack's ear and pulled it.

"You little digester," he exclaimed, "didn't I tell you that I wouldn't have my brother touched?"

"Why can't he let me alone?" replied Jack.

Funnybird was about to administer condign punishment upon Jack, which his superior size fully enabled him to do, when Timor interferred.

"Let him go!" he said; "Dashley is

a friend of mine. You don't want to quarrel with me, do you?"

"Not exactly!" answered Funnybird Major, releasing Jack. "But I don't quite understand this."

Timor drew Funnybird into the room and whispered something in his ear; at the same time the dinner-bell rang, and they all began to prepare for the mid-day meal.

"I wonder ~~K~~ took your part," observed Owen.

"He couldn't very well do otherwise, only that's a secret!" Jack replied.

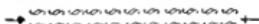
"From me?"

"Yes, for the present."

"I thought I was your chum?"

"So you are, dear boy, and some day I may tell you all, but not just now."

Owen was not half satisfied with this answer, but he was glad to see that Timor was Jack's friend, for the Russian held a high position in the house, and had a great deal of influence for good or evil, both from his great strength and his long standing in the school.



CHAPTER VII.

STRANGE VISITORS.

JACK was working very hard to obtain an extra mathematical prize which was given by Mr. Drinkwater, one of the assistant mathematical masters.

He was a private pupil of Mr. Drinkwater, who did not take any boarders, but had a small house in the college.

Twice a week he went in the evening with Owen Tudor and Bill Bragg to Mr. Drinkwater's house, and was initiated in the mysteries of Euclid and algebra.

A day or two after the events described in the last chapter, he had applied to and obtained permission from his tutor to sit up an hour later than usual.

His head was full of if A be the centre of the circle B C D, etc., and simple equations, until it ached with all the knowledge that he had put into it.

Feeling hot and feverish, he opened the window and looked out.

It was exactly eleven o'clock, for he heard the college clock strike the hour.

All at once he heard someone whistle, and looking into the starlight night, he perceived two figures standing in the yard.

They were just outside Timor's window, which was on the first floor, about fifteen feet from the ground.

The whistle seemed to be a signal, but as no notice was taken of it, one of the men threw a handful of gravel up at the window.

A street lamp threw a little light into the yard, and Jack noticed that one of

the men, who was muffled in a thick cloak, was of unusual size and height.

He could not help thinking that this individual bore a striking resemblance to Ivan Petroskowitch, the gipsy, while the thin, elongated, attenuated form of the other reminded him strangely of Herne the Hunter.

Retreating into his room, he took the precaution to blow out the candle, so that the room was in utter darkness.

The light would have attracted the attention of those without, and he wished to be able to watch their movements.

When the gravel was thrown at the window it roused Timor, who opened the casement.

"Below there," he said, in a cautious tone.

"Moscow!" replied the man in the cloak.

Timor immediately let something fall out of the window, which Jack with some difficulty perceived was a rope-ladder.

He made one end of it fast to the bar going across the window and the other end fell on the ground.

By the aid of this the two men climbed up to Timor's room and entered it, being lost to sight.

Jack continued at the window for fully half-an-hour, when he saw the men reappear, and this time they had with them a sack which appeared to be very heavy.



"IVE A GOOD MIND TO TELL MY BROTHER," CRIED FUNNYBIRD."

With difficulty the men got the sack down the rope-ladder, and disappeared as mysteriously as they had come.

There was nothing more to be seen, and closing his window, Jack went to bed much perplexed and puzzled at what had taken place.

Who were Timor's mysterious nocturnal visitors, and what did they want in the house at that time of night?

These were questions which he did not find it easy to answer.

In the morning Jack went downstairs to the kitchen to get a cup of coffee before he went into school, and in the hallway he met the footman, who, owing to a cast in his left eye, had been christened "Cockeye" by the boys.

He was in a very perturbed and agitated state, which did not fail to attract Jack's attention.

"Anything up?" asked Jack.

"Hup?" replied Cockeye; "I should say there was."

"What is it?"

"The 'ouse has been robbed during the night. All the plate's carried off, and missis's jewels is gone. It's a clear five thousand pounds robbery."

"Whew!" whistled Jack.

"It's so mysterious," continued Cockeye. "The 'ouse ain't been entered anywhere. We can't make hout 'ow the thieves got in. The butler's gone hup to the police, but it's a queer start."

Jack said nothing, but he thought of what he had seen the night before, and could not help associating Timor's midnight visitors with the robbery.

Taking his coffee, he went into school, and having got through his lessons, he after prayers prepared for fagging.

Timor looked very ill.

In fact, he did not seem to have slept all night, for his eyes were red and swollen, and his face wore an anxious expression.

Jack did not know what to do.

He felt it his duty of tell Mr. Dryasdust that he had seen strange people enter Timor's room, but on the other hand he might be accusing the Russian wrongfully.

Being in doubt, he resolved to speak to Timor first.

"You look bad," he remarked.

"Yes. I could not sleep last night," replied Timor.

"No more could I," answered Jack. "I was looking out of my window at eleven o'clock."

Timor sank into a chair as if he had been shot.

"You can go," he said. "I don't want anything this morning, and if Funnybird requires anything, Tudor can fetch it."

Jack looked upon this dismissal as a sign of guilt.

He, however, retired, and prepared his own breakfast, being soon afterwards rejoined by Owen, who seemed in a bad temper.

"Just my luck," said Owen. "College rolls again. I wish that fellow Funnybird would choke himself over them."

Putting on his hat, he departed to seek the hot soft roll for the delectation of his master's appetite.

Scarcely had Jack commenced his breakfast, which consisted of sardines and bread and butter, than Timor entered the room, closing the door carefully after him.

"Dashley," he exclaimed, "I want you to promise me that you will not say anything about what you saw last night."

"Why not?" replied Jack.

"Because it might get me into trouble. You have heard the news, I suppose?"

"About the robbery, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I heard that the first thing this morning."

"Don't you see," pursued Timor, "that I might be mixed up in the affair?"

"Certainly I do. But who were your visitors?" asked Jack.

"That I cannot say."

"I feel I ought to tell Mr. Dryasdust," said Jack, thoughtfully. "That is to say, if I am asked."

"Oh, well, if you wait till then I am all right. No one is likely to ask you any questions."

"Why should you be afraid?" inquired Jack.

"I'm not afraid," Timor replied, petulantly; "only it looks suspicious. Two friends came to see me last night, and the robbery took place. Of course my friends had nothing to do with it, but I might be associated with it. Will you promise me to keep your mouth closed?"

"No, I will not."

"You defy me?"

"If you like to regard it in that light you can."

"Then I am your enemy," said Timor, grinding his teeth.

"It strikes me, my dear boy," replied Jack, "that as things stand at this moment I can do you infinitely more harm than you can do me."

"All right; we will see."

"I shall exercise my own discretion in this matter," continued Jack.

"Will you do me one favour?" asked Timor.

"What is that?"

"Wait till to-morrow before you say anything."

"Yes, I don't mind that," replied Jack.

Timor left him, apparently satisfied with this answer, but Jack was annoyed with himself directly he had gone for having made the promise.

A big robbery had been committed, and he could not doubt that Timor was in some way associated with it, even though he might not have derived any particular benefit from it.

That there was some mysterious connection between him and the gypsies commanded by his uncle was clear.

It was Jack's duty to tell his tutor all that he knew, yet he resolved to wait until the next day before he said anything.

Perhaps, he thought on reflection, his story would be denied by Timor and laughed at by everyone, simply because it was so extremely improbable.

He was certainly placed in an unpleasant position, and he wished he had known nothing about it.

When Owen came back he found that Jack had not touched his breakfast.

"You need not have waited for me," he remarked.

"I was thinking," replied Jack.

"Of what?"

"Oh, that problem we have to work out at old Drinkwater's to-night," said Jack, evasively. "Draw the straight line A B, and if A be the centre of the circle B C D—"

"Oh, shut up!" interrupted Owen. "Cut the shop out of school."

"I can't."

"You'll have Euclid on the brain."

"Can't help it, dear boy," said Jack. "I was born to be a mathematician. But what worries me most just now is my Latin theme."

"I've done mine all right."

"So have I done mine—after a fashion. I didn't take any trouble over it, though, and I'm afraid it won't pass."

They finished breakfast, and Jack went into the pupils' room to have the theme corrected before he showed it up in school.

Mr. Dryasdust sat at his desk, and when it was put before him made many corrections.

At length he took it in his hands and tore it up.

The unlucky theme was "torn over," which meant that it must be done again.

"This is the worst piece of work you have shown up yet, Dashley," said Mr. Dryasdust. "If you do not do more careful studies I shall have to complain of you to the head master."

This conveyed the threat of a flogging, and Jack felt uncomfortable.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he replied.

"Do your work conscientiously, and be not dazzled by visions of imaginary Herne the Hunters."

"Please, sir, I saw—"

"Tush! you must not think that because I am a well-known antiquary you can tell me ghost stories," interrupted Mr. Dryasdust, impatiently.

"I did indeed see Herne, and Timor is a liar."

"What! Use better language, sir. Write out fifty lines of Ovid for using that expression."

"I mean he did not speak the truth, sir."

"Then say what you mean."

"I mean what I say," cried Jack.

"What's that?" demanded the master.

"Nothing, sir," replied Jack, thinking it advisable to keep quiet.

He had read somewhere that language was given to man to conceal his thoughts.

In the present instance he could not do better than act on that admirable principle, as he had no wish to incur the resentment of his tutor, which would surely procure him an interview with the head master, which could not fail to be of a painful nature.

Mr. Dryasdust handed him a key, saying—

"This is the key of my library. I never allow anyone but myself in there, not even a servant. I dust the table and the shelves myself, because I am afraid of having my papers stolen or disarranged."

"What shall I do with it, sir?"

And boy and man stood confronting each other.

Mr. Dryasdust pointed to the key, saying—

"Let yourself in. You will find on shelf A an essay on Curtius, who leaped into the gulf to save Rome. That is the subject of your theme. Read it, and improve on your subject."

This was very kind of Mr. Dryasdust, and Jack felt it to be so.

"Thank you, sir," he answered. "I will try to do better in future."

"Judging from your effort to-day, Dashley, there is room for improvement," replied Mr. Dryasdust, sarcastically.

Jack made no answer to this speech, but taking up the key, went to the library and opened the door to get the book referred to.

He had scarcely opened it before Owen Tudor ran up to him.

"I say, Jack," he exclaimed, "come upstairs."

"What for?" inquired Jack.

"I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Who told you I was here?"

"Timor said you had been 'torn over,' and had gone to the library."

"Well, here I am. I've got to look up Curtius. It's a beastly shame, but it can't be helped. What's the row?"

"Funnybird Minor is drowning your white mice in the basin."

"Is he?"

Jack was in a great rage at this news, for he had five white mice in a cage, and he was very fond of them.

It was maddening to think that Funnybird was drowning them in his absence, and gloating over their dying agonies.

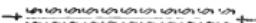
Leaving the key in the door, he hastened upstairs, accompanied by Owen.

"I'll give him something," he exclaimed.

"If it was I," said Owen, "he should have what for. He said he was doing it to get square with you."

"The beast!" replied Jack.

He hurried to his room and caught Funnybird Minor in the act of putting the last living white mouse in the basin, where the others were floating on their backs.



CHAPTER VIII.

A MEAN REVENGE.

THE empty cage was on the table, and the last mouse was struggling in the water.

Funnybird was grinning at his wickedness, and pushing the dying mouse under with his fingers.

Not hesitating a moment, Jack hit him in the eye and knocked him down.

"Hullo! what's that?" asked Funnybird.

"Get up and I'll give you another," replied Jack.

Funnybird Minor was too much of a coward to stand up and fight, so he laid still on the floor and whimpered.

"It's a beastly shame to hit a fellow like that unawares," he continued. "You

might have told me you were going to do it."

"What do you mean by drowning my mice?"

"I—I won't do it again."

Jack hit him, and Funnybird began to roar for help.

"Shut up," said Jack, "I don't care if you rouse the whole house. You are always doing something to me and Owen."

"Because I hate you," replied Funnybird.

"Well, I'll trouble you to let us alone in future. Get out of here, and if you don't buy me five more white mice before dinner-time I'll take it out of you."

Funnybird got up and ran out of the room.

When on the threshold he put his finger to his nose and "took a sight," after which he put his tongue in his cheek.

"You're not everybody," he exclaimed.

Jack shied a dictionary at him, but missed, and Owen, who was in the passage, received it on his nose.

"Hold on there, Jack," he cried. "I have some regard for my nasal organ if you have not."

"Awfully sorry, dear boy," answered Jack.

"Try and shy straight next time."

"I will. Accept my apology; it shan't oeern again. Where's that pumpkin head gone?"

Funnybird was still in the passage, and he heard this question.

"Now you stop that, Dashley?" he exclaimed.

"What is that?"

"I ain't going to be pumpkined by you."

"Go on," exclaimed Jack, making a rush for him, "or it will be the worse for you."

But Funnybird knew how to use his legs, and showed him a clean pair of heels.

"Confound the fellow!" said Owen Tudor; "he's always worrying you and I. We shall have to make a dead set at him."

Jack looked regretfully at the dead mice.

"I'd like to drown him," he replied, "and I would lick him within an inch of his life now only I have no time. Mr. Dryasdust is very particular about his library door being open, and I have left the key in the lock."

"So you have; but I don't suppose anyone will go in," answered Owen.

"Just chuck those mice out of the window, will you?" continued Jack, "and I'll go and get the book."

Owen promised compliance with this request, while Jack ran downstairs to the library, the entrance to which was up a small passage.

As he reached this he saw the form of Timor, who was hastening along, and who held up one hand to his face as if he wished to escape observation.

They did not pass one another, as

Timor went into the pupils' room, but it seemed to Jack as if he had just come out of the library.

What could he want there?

This was more than he could answer, for Timor had of late become quite a man of mystery.

When he entered the library the door was wide open, and he thought this was strange, for he had left it ajar.

Somebody had been inside, because there was no wind to blow it open.

Who could it have been?

A strong smell of burning paper assailed his nostrils, and looking at the fire which flamed in the grate, he saw a large pile of papers nearly consumed to ashes.

It had been thrown on the fire in a heap.

He naturally thought that Mr. Dryasdust had been in the room during his absence and burnt some papers which were of no use.

Going to shelf A he searched for the essay on Curtins, which he had no difficulty in finding.

Opening it, he carelessly glanced over its pages.

While he was thus occupied Mr. Dryasdust entered the room.

"Well, Dashley," he exclaimed, "have you found what you want?"

"Yes, sir, thank you," replied Jack.

"Run along then with it to your own room. I have half-an-hour to work in before school, and want to be alone."

Jack turned towards the door, and his tutor sat down at his desk.

Suddenly he uttered a loud cry, and the pen which he had taken up dropped from his hand.

"Great heaven," he exclaimed, "where is my manuscript?"

"What, sir?" asked Jack.

"My manuscript!"

He looked in the fireplace and saw the burning pile of papers, now nearly consumed, and rushing to the grate, snatched off those that yet remained unburnt, regardless of his hands, which were badly burnt.

One glance at the charred and blackened remains sufficed to show him that the fragment was all that was left of his cherished history of Windsor Castle.

The great work of his life, over which

he had spent fifteen years, was destroyed in as many minutes.

Shaking his fist at Jack, he exclaimed—

"Wretched boy, what have you done?"

Jack was astounded.

"Done, sir?" he replied. "Nothing."

"Yes you have."

"What, sir?"

"Because I tore over your theme and gave you a punishment you have burnt my book out of a mean, paltry, and pitiful spirit of revenge."

At this accusation Jack felt very much hurt, for he was thoroughly incapable of doing such a thing, and knew very well that he was innocent, though he made every allowance for the exasperation of his tutor.

To see the work of the quarter of a lifetime destroyed was enough to irritate a saint.

"I declare on my word of honour, sir," he exclaimed, "that I know no more about your manuscript than the man in the moon."

"How is that, when I keep the door locked and you are the only one who had the key?"

"I opened the door and ran upstairs because Tudor told me Funnybird Minor was drowning my white mice."

"Can you prove that?"

"Easily. Call Tudor and Funnybird before I communicate with them."

"I must give you the benefit of the doubt if that is true, but you do not know how this cuts me to the heart," said Mr. Dryasdust. "The labour of years is gone. It maddens me."

He sat down, bent over his desk, buried his face in his hands, and Jack could see the bitter tears trickling through his fingers.

Jack was almost as much agitated as his tutor, but he thought he should easily be able to clear himself.

Presently Mr. Dryasdust recovered from his momentary depression and rang the bell, which brought up the footman.

"Call Mr. Funnybird Minor," he said.

In a few minutes Funnybird appeared, and was asked if Jack had gone upstairs to prevent his drowning some white mice.

"Yes, sir, he did," replied Funnybird, thinking he was going to be punished.

"I am sorry I did it, and I will buy him some more."

"You can go."

Funnybird went on his way rejoicing, and Mr. Dryasdust again turned to Jack.

"Your statement that you quitted the library leaving the key in the door is so far borne out, and it is not necessary to call Tudor, but I cannot help thinking that you burnt my book."

"Please, sir," replied Jack, "it is not fair to say that."

"You were smarting under a sense of oppression when you entered this room, for you had to write out fifty lines and do another theme. I am afraid you are a strange boy. The story you told about Herne the Hunter induces me to think you are making fun of me. I cannot altogether believe you."

"It is very hard for you to hold such opinions," Jack said.

"Go away now and leave me alone. I cannot conscientiously punish you, as someone else may have destroyed my manuscript; but this I can say—I shall never be able to trust you again."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because you are not trustworthy."

Jack had been about to tell him of the man who visited Timor, but he saw now that it would be useless.

He was in disgrace, and he would have to wait for the vindication of his character, which could only be brought about by time.

Leaving the room sadly, he found Timor anxiously awaiting him in the passage.

"You look as if you had been getting a wigging," he remarked.

"I have been most unjustly accused," replied Jack.

"Of what?"

"Some dastardly wretch has burnt up Mr. Dryasdust's manuscript on which he has so long been engaged."

"Impossible!" said Timor, affecting great surprise.

"It is a fact."

"Who does he suspect?"

"Me, and I'll swear I never dreamt of such a thing. I wouldn't have done it for the world; I wanted to stand well with my tutor. It's too bad," said Jack, in a tone of vexation.

"Yes, it is; but if you didn't do it who do you think did?"

"I can't tell," Jack replied. "All I know is that Mr. Dryasdust declares he will never again believe anything I say. Oh, if I find out the scoundrel who has got me into this trouble I'll— I'll pulverise him."

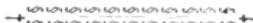
He ground his heel on the floor to give Timor an idea of the process of pulverisation.

"Sorry for you," said Timor; "stroll on. It's nearly school time."

As he went along he smiled to himself.

"I don't think he is very dangerous now," he muttered. "He has fallen very low in Mr. Dryasdust's estimation, and anything he can say about me will not have much weight."

For the first time since the Russian had made his mysterious descent into the old tree he held up his head and smiled.



CHAPTER IX.

JACK AND HIS FRIENDS GO OUT SHOOTING.

To be suspected of having behaved so badly to his tutor made Jack Dashley feel very miserable.

But there was no help for it.

He had to bear the suspicion, and wait until something turned up to clear him.

He could see that Mr. Dryasdust's manner was altered, and he was always being punished for the slightest fault, which, before the valuable manuscript was burnt, would have been looked over.

Days glided by, and no trace of the real culprit could be discovered.

The mystery of Herne's oak remained as deep as ever.

Jack became reckless, and did not work as hard as he used to.

He lost his position in the school, and was frequently at the bottom of the class.

Everyone said that he would be flogged soon, and though this is a fate that frequently overtakes Etonians, all good boys wish to avoid it.

Bill Bragg was not a good boy.

He had been flogged more than once, and did not care for it, and he and Jack became more intimate than ever.

Owen Tudor did not like this intimacy, but he was so much attached to Jack that he would go wherever he did.

Jack and Owen were coming out of school one morning after twelve, and when nearing their house they saw an old bat in the road.

An old hat is very tempting.

It is almost impossible to resist the temptation of kicking it.

There is something about an old hat

in the street which seems to attract the foot.

"Look at that hat," said Jack. "I'll take a running kick at it. See me give it a rouser."

"Bet you don't lift it your height," replied Owen.

"Done with you, for sixpence."

Jack ran forward, and kicked the hat as hard as he could.

But it only moved a few inches, and Jack, limping on one leg, began to nurse his right foot.

"Oh, Lor'!" he cried. "I've broken my toe, I think."

"What is it?" asked Owen.

"There's something inside it, Owen, I think. Oh, dear, I'd sooner have kicked the side of a house."

Owen went forward and examined the hat, which was full of bricks.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "Sold again. It's chock full of bricks. What a lark."

"I don't see it. If I could only catch the fellow who planted this, I'd give him what for."

Bill Bragg made his appearance from a doorway, grinning.

"How are you, Dashley?" he asked.

"All right up to now," answered Jack, "Did you put that ugly old hat in the road?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you, I did."

"Take that, then."

Jack hit him a smart blow on the nose, which sent him rolling over the hat in the street, and when he got up he looked very foolish.

"I say," he cried, "that isn't square,

I didn't think you'd do a mean thing like that to a friend."

"I wish you had my toe," replied Jack.

"It can't be more painful than my nose. Look here, I didn't plant it for you."

"You were hiding in that doorway and saw me coming—why didn't you holla out?"

"Well, I don't know," said Bill Bragg. "Firstly, I didn't know you were going to kick it, and when I saw you run, it seemed natural to let you do it. The fact is, I put it there for old B. and S."

"Who's he?"

"The coach who lives at Datchet. He's what they call a private tutor. His name's Benjamin Soda. B. Soda, the fellows call him Brandy and Soda. The masters are down on me for not learning quick enough, and I want to come out well in the examinations, so I have got my governor to allow me to go to him in the evenings."

"That's a good idea. I'd like to do the same," said Jack.

"So would I," remarked Owen, "for it will be an excuse to get out at night, and we might have some fun if we didn't learn much."

"Lots of it," rejoined Bill Bragg. "Old Brandy and Soda is a teetotaller, but his wife drinks like a fish, and they quarrel like one o'clock. I expect him to call upon me to-day to make arrangements, and I fancied he'd kick the hat."

"I don't believe you care who kicks it so long as somebody does," said Jack.

"Well, I don't care much, only I'm sorry you did it."

"Are you?"

"Honour bright, I am."

"Then give me your fist. I'm sorry I hit you that smeller. Shake hands."

They grasped each other's hands warmly.

"Here's Funnybird Minor coming Dodge into the doorway," exclaimed Bill Bragg. "I'd like to see that youngster sucked in."

"Come on. I've got my squirt full of water," replied Jack.

"And I've got my pea-shooter," said Owen. "We'll warn him."

The hat was still standing erect, and looking very inviting for a kick.

In an instant the boys had hidden

themselves in the friendly doorway, and Funnybird approached the tempting object.

He looked up at Owen Tudor's window, which was open.

"Baa-a! ma-a-a!" he cried.

"He's doing the goat to rile me," remarked Owen. "Oh, the beast!"

"Hold on a bit; you'll have your revenge before long," replied Jack.

Funnybird Minor's eyes now fell upon the hat.

"Ha!" he said, "a hat. See me send it flying. What a pity I won't."

He too indulged in a running kick, and the hat rolled lazily a few paces, while Funnybird rolled on his back, nursing his toe as Jack had done and uttering deep groans.

"My leg's broken," he whined. "I know it is. Confound the hat. What's in it?"

He got up and was about to look inside when he received the contents of Jack's squirt in his ear, and was nicely peppered with peas from Owen's shooter, while Bill Bragg laughed loudly.

"Go on, you howling Zulus!" he exclaimed. "I've a good mind to tell my brother."

"Don't spoil a good mind; do it," answered Jack.

Funnybird received another broadside from the pea-shooter, and seeing Jack refilling his squirt at a puddle of dirty water, he took to his heels.

"Set it again," said Bragg.

Jack replaced the hat in the perpendicular from the horizontal, and again the boys waited.

This time a middle-aged man came along with a quick step.

It was Mr. Benjamin Soda, the "coach" of whom Bragg had spoken.

When he saw the hat he chuckled softly to himself, as if the idea pleased him highly.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed, adding, "Playful youths; someone has cast his discarded head gear into the street. It looks bad. I will remove it to the gutter. I am carried back to the days of my boyhood, when I played the noble game of football. There wasn't a better kicker-off than I was. This is how we used to do it."

He stepped back a few paces and ran in at the hat, the result being most dis-

astrous, for he fell down in the road, and all his interest seemed instantly to centre in his big toe.

"Oh, Cesar!" he cried, "I'm lamed for life. Oh, Jerusalem the Golden—hallelujah! I won't swear. Blessed are the meek in spirit! Jehoshaphat! Oh, the pain! It is good for us to suffer. We are born to it as the sparks fly upwards. Oh, my toe—t-o-e—toe! I wish I could see the gentle youths who prepared this infernal machine. Ah! there they are hiding in the doorway, three of them."

Limping up to the conspirators, who were choking with laughter, he made a grimace and grinned a ghastly grin.

"To which of you young gentlemen am I indebted for the little entertainment which has just been afforded me?" he demanded.

"Not us, sir," replied Jack. "It was that other boy who has just run up the street."

"Indeed! Do you consider telling falsehoods a necessary part of your education?"

"By no means, sir."

"And you mean to tell me that you did not place that—that infernal machine in the middle of the road?"

"If we did," said Owen, "you were not obliged to kick it."

"Your remark is logical, but I shall require each of you to write out and bring me fifty lines of Virgil to-morrow evening."

"You can't give punishments, for you are not a master," exclaimed Jack.

"Perfectly correct; yet I can report you to your tutor, and at my request he will punish you more severely than I have done."

"I'm going to be one of your private tutors, sir," said Bragg, "and these friends of mine also want to join the class, so you will let us off this time, won't you?"

"Ah, that alters the case."

Bragg introduced Dashley and Tudor, who arranged to come twice a week to his house, and he remitted the "pœna," as the Eton boys call a punishment.

When he was gone they sauntered up college past the timbrels and up the Slough Road.

"I knew I'd get over old B. and S.," said Bragg; "he's not a bad sort. But

what do you fellows say to an hour or two's shooting?"

"Shooting!" echoed Jack and Owen in a breath, "that would be spiff. How can you arrange it?"

"I have arranged it. Slap-bang and all alive! You see I have made the acquaintance of Mr. Splawger, of Chalvey Farm, where there are plenty of rabbits, and all we have to do is to go to the farmhouse, where there are three guns and powder and shot awaiting us."

"Come on, then," said Jack. "Can you shoot, Bill?"

"I should rather think so. Why, in one day at my father's place I killed to my own gun one hundred and fifty rabbits, sixty brace of pheasants, sixty brace of partridges, twenty woodcock, and ten hares. The birds always fly away when they see me coming."

"That be blowed for a yarn."

"It's true, as sure as I'm slap-bang and all alive!"

They crossed the football-field, jumped over Chalvey brook, and cut across the country to the farmhouse, finding the farmer's wife at home.

"Guv'nor out, ma'am?" asked Bragg. "You remember me? I was here a day or two ago."

The woman made a profound curtsey.

"Yes, my lord," she responded, humbly. "I hope your lordship's health is good. The guns are all ready in the parlour. Please help yourself."

"Thank you, Mrs. Splawger. When do you expect the old man in?"

"Presently, my lord. He's around the farm."

"Just tell him to get a snack ready for us. Nothing extravagant you know, bread and cheese and beer. Slap-bang and all alive!"

"With pleasure, my lord," replied the farmer's wife, with the same respectful degree of attention.

"We are only going out for an hour to kill a few rabbits and keep our hands in. Ta, ta! be good to yourself, old lady."

Kissing the tips of his fingers to her in a familiar way, the irrepressible Bragg led his companions into the parlour, where they found three guns.

Each took one, as well as a flask of powder, another of shot, a box of exp-

and some wads, which the farmer had carefully punched for them.

"Why did the woman call you 'my lord?'" inquired Jack.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Bill Bragg, in some confusion. "I'm often taken for a member of the peerage."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes; fact, I assure you. It's a way I've got, I suppose. Slap-bang and all alive! Come on, step out lively."

Jack fancied that like all Bragg's facts this ought to be taken with a grain of salt, but he made no observation.

They saluted forth and walked along the side of a hedge in search of rabbits, not seeing any for the simple reason that there were none on the estate.

A few unsuspecting sparrows and an occasional lark perched on the hedge and on the branches of the trees, but Jack and Owen were too good sportsmen to go in for such small game.

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Bragg, "I never saw such shooting as this; there isn't a bit of fur or feather in the place. I shall blaze away at a sparrow."

"That isn't good enough for me," replied Jack.

"Nor me," said Owen. "I haven't come to that yet."

A sparrow came within a few yards of him and Bragg let fly, missing the bird, which was not surprising, as he carefully shut his eyes before he pulled the trigger.

But what did surprise him was that he was thrown violently on his back.

"Halloa! where are you going to?" asked Jack.

"Blessed if I know. Hang the old rusty thing. I believe I must have put in a double charge of powder to make it kick so. Never mind, I'll load up again. Where's the bird? I know I hit him, for I saw the feathers fly."

"It flew away to order its coffin for a future occasion," Jack replied, laughing.

"Hem! that's funny, but it don't matter. The best shots will miss sometimes. This gun carries high and I'm not in form to-day. Try again's my motto. Slap-bang and all alive!"

At this moment a hare started from the furze.

Jack saw it going across the meadow, and raised his gun, fired, and killed it.

"Ha, well done!" cried Bragg. "An easy shot, though. 'The merry brown hare came leaping,' eh? Just like my luck. Pity I wasn't loaded."

They picked up the hare and strolled on, Bragg firing away at the sparrows and always missing them, much to his disgust.

"There's a cow over there," suggested Jack.

"And a hayrick in the corner," said Owen.

"Come, I say, you fellows oughtn't to chaff a chap," replied Bragg. "I've given you some shooting, and it isn't kind to say the least of it."

"I thought you were such a dead shot."

"So I am. Look at that old crow on the tree. See me pot him."

Bragg took a good and steady aim at the crow, who sat still and blinked at him with supreme contempt.

Bang!

There was a cry from the other side of the hedge.

The bird flew away and a man popped up like a jack-in-the-box.

He was a farm labourer, and he rubbed his corduroy trousers in an energetic manner, as if he suffered from some local irritation.

"Coom, young measter," he exclaimed in a broad Berkshire dialect, "dang my buttons but it's too bad, as a chap can't eat his bit o' bread and bacon w/out being shot."

"Did I really hit you?" asked Bragg, as if he was rather proud of the achievement than otherwise.

"Did you hit Oi? Why I be shot i' the back."

"Dear me, that's good. It seems as if I was improving."

He turned to his companions to seek for applause.

"I saw the beggar behind the hedge, and not considering a crow worth powder and shot, I determined to wake him up. I'm a wonderful shot when I like," he explained.

"So it seems," replied Jack, dryly.

The countryman left off rubbing, and pushed his way through a gap in the hedge.

"Ain't you going to give Oi summat?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know about that."

answered Bragg, who was as mean as he was boastful.

"Then Oi ha' your gun, sure as eggs is eggs."

At this threat Bragg put his hands in his pockets.

"By Jove!" he said; "just like me. Came out without any money. Got lots of tin in my bureau. Just tip the clod half-a-quid for me, Dashley. I'll make it all right."

Jack thought the man deserved compensation, and willingly gave him half-a-sovereign.

Before he handed it over he put it to his lips.

"What did you do that for?" queried Bragg.

"Oh, I was only kissing it good-bye before parting," answered Jack.

"You think I won't pay you again?"

"Something of that sort."

"By Jove! we agree for once, for I'm of the same opinion," laughed Bragg, whose impudence was charming.

The labourer was perfectly satisfied with the present he had received, for it amounted to a week's wages.

"Good-day, gentlemen," he said, "and thankee for me."

He scrambled through the hedge, and re-commenced the rubbing process.

"Rattling good pot that," remarked Owen. "What is the next article?"

They had approached a small cottage, and in a yard attached to it were a quantity of game fowls.

"Why," replied Bragg, "there is the next thing right before your eyes—slap-bang and all alive. Pheasants, my dear boy, pheasants."

Owen was about to ask him how he could mistake barn-door fowls for pheasants, but Jack touched him on the arm.

"Let the fool alone," he whispered.

"Hush!" said Bragg. "I found these—my first shot. Keep quiet."

He crawled cautiously up to the fowls, as if he was stalking a herd of deer, and when he got close to, he fired, giving them both barrels.

The consequence was disastrous to the chickens, for as they were all in a cluster, he killed half-a-dozen and wounded as many more.

The cock crowed, the hens chuckled, and the woman who owned the cottage

rushed out, followed by half-a-dozen children.

"Stand back, my good woman," exclaimed Bragg, who advanced to pick up the game; "those are mine."

"Yes; when you pay for them," she replied.

"Game is never paid for. I am shooting over this farm, and I have the permission of Farmer Splawger."

"What has he got to do with my fowls?"

"Fowls?" repeated Bragg, his gun dropping as he began to see that he had made a mistake. "Why I thought they were pheasants. If I have committed an error, and made a beefsteak—mistake, I mean—I will compensate you. Estimate your damage, and come to Eton. Ask for Mr. Bragg. Everyone knows me."

"My husband will see me righted."

"Excellent man; I should like to make his acquaintance. Slap-bang and all alive."

"I'll slap-bang you if you don't pay up, you conceited, ignorant, dirty little cheat!" cried the poor woman; and seizing a clothes prop, she dashed towards him, flourishing it fiercely above her head.

Bragg sprang back.

"I don't like to show the white feather," he said; "but she is a hot member, and inclined to make it warm for me, so I think we'd better cut it."

He ran and the others followed him.

They soon distanced the woman, whose angry voice rang in their ears.

"Saved!" cried Bragg. "I wasn't afraid of her, you know, but a row with a woman is always better avoided."

"Pity you didn't carry off your pheasants," remarked Jack.

"Deuce take it," replied Bragg, "I can't make out how I fell into that error. They looked for all the world like pheasants. Hold on, there's a hare."

A fine hare started as he spoke almost under his feet, and ran straight in the direction of a cow which was placidly grazing in the field.

"I'll soon cook his goose. No trouble in settling his hash," continued Bill.

He fired, and to his astonishment the hare continued his wild career, until stopped by Owen, who shot it at the distance, but the cow uttered a deep

lowing noise, erected her tail, and started off like a circus horse.

"What did you do that for?" he asked.

"What?" replied Owen.

"Shoot the cow. I killed the hare, and you, you lubber, hit the poor cow. Look how she's going on."

Owen was indignant at this assertion, which he knew to be untrue, and he felt angry at Bill's unblushing effrontery.

"Well," he answered, "you have got cheek."

"I call it a whole face," said Jack.

"Come, come," exclaimed Bragg. "You did shoot the cow, old boy, and you know it, but I won't be hard on you."

"What do you mean?"

"I won't tell the fellows. Ha, ha! fancy shooting at a hare and hitting an old cow! Best joke I ever heard of, 'pon my word."

"I didn't do it."

"Oh, yes you did. Accidents will happen in the best regulated families. Ha, ha!"

"You know you did it yourself," said Owen.

"All right, say it was me; it pleases you and don't hurt me. Sorry for the cow, though. Cattle in these parts ought to have their lives insured when you are around shooting. Make haste back to the farm. I'm peckish, and could pitch into the lunch. We've done enough for one day."

"So I should think. Bragg, you shot a man, peppered a cow, and slaughtered a lot of barn-door fowls. There is only one thing that remains for you to do, and that is shoot yourself; if you did, there'd be one fool less in the world."

Bragg had walked on ahead and pretended not to hear these remarks.

"Don't get excited, Owen," said Jack.

"I can't help it, he aggravates me so. Did I shoot that cow?"

"He says so."

"But you know jolly well I didn't."

"Of course I do; that's right enough. Pick up the hare and come on," returned Jack.

Owen Tudor smothered his wrath, took up the hare, and with Jack walked after Bragg, whom they soon overtook.

His serenity was not in the least disturbed by what had occurred, and he was smiling sweetly like a child at play.

"What a day we're having," he remarked. "This is what I like—beautiful weather, splendid sport, and good company. By the way, Tudor, I'll trouble you for my hare."

"Which one?"

"The one I shot just now; you have been kind enough to pick it up for me, I see. I shall make it a present to my tutor, and he'll invite me to supper, bottle of wine, and all that sort of thing, you know. Slap-bang and all alive!"

"Where will you have it?" asked Owen, in whose eyes gleamed a dangerous fire.

"I think I'll carry it in my hand."

Owen raised the hare and hit him over the head with it in a way which brought him on his knees.

Recovering himself, he wiped some splashes of blood from his face and said—

"None of your larks, now, or it will be the worse for you."

"I'm not larking."

"Yes you are; I know you. If you wanted the hare, why didn't you say so? I'd have made you a present of it. Keep it, but don't play so roughly. I hate larking like a couple of Suday cads out for a holiday."

Owen made no answer, and as they were near the farmhouse they quickened their pace.

The farmer was at the door, and two labouring men were talking to him.

He was a bluff, hearty specimen of the representatives of the English agricultural interest, but there was a cloud upon his brow.

"Ah, Splawger," exclaimed Bragg, genially. "Glad to see you, old boy. How's corn, and what's the price of turnips?"

"Corn is down, my lord, but turnips is up," answered the farmer. "But look here, they tell me you've shot one of my men and played old Harry with a cow."

"That's all right. I'll compensate you. Send in your bill. Slap-bang and all alive!"

The farmer looked dubiously at him.

CHAPTER X.

THE GIPSY'S WARNING.

"WHERE is the lunch, Splawger?" asked Bragg. "We are as hungry as hunters, and just in the condition to do justice to it. None of your namby-pamby appetites, you know. Solid on the bread-and-cheese question."

"Step inside, my lord," replied the farmer.

They entered the parlour, where everything was laid out nicely and temptingly.

The cheese was in splendid cut, the celery white, the watercresses from Salt Hill brown and crisp, the ale amber-coloured and full of life.

"Now, boys," said Bragg, "fall to. I'm treating. Slap-hang and all alive!"

"I'll be with you directly," replied Jack, leaving Owen and Bragg to eat the lunch.

He was struck by the way in which the farmer and his wife persistently called Bill "my lord," and he could not help thinking that he was up to some trick or another.

If he was perpetrating a fraud, Jack was too much of a gentleman to wish to be any party to it.

So he determined to speak to the farmer and see how affairs really stood.

Going up to the man, who was in his stock-yard examining the wounded cow which had just been brought in, he touched him on the arm.

"Can I speak a word to you?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly, sir; a dozen if you like," replied Mr. Splawger.

"It is evident to me," continued Jack, "that you are a good fellow, and I don't want to see you badly treated. It may be all right, but my friend has a faculty for getting into scrapes, and——"

"Perhaps he didn't mean it," interrupted the farmer, "and to tell you the honest truth I don't know which of you shot the cow, but here she is, and I'll have to kill her. Of course the meat's good and I can sell the carcase, but there is all the difference between dead meat and a cow in full milk."

"That is true."

"His lordship will have to pay for it," said the farmer.

"Why do you call him his lordship?" asked Jack. "His name is Bill Bragg."

The farmer jumped half a foot in the air.

"What?" he cried. "Then he's bested me?"

"Possibly; but don't get excited. I came outside on purpose to arrange this matter, for I guessed there was something wrong."

"Look here, sir," exclaimed the farmer. "He came to me a few days ago, and stating he was Lord Coventry, asked for a few hours' shooting whenever he required it. He said money was no object, and hang the expense. He should bring a few friends and want a little refreshment. I was to find the guns and all that. Now, really, ain't he Lord Coventry?"

"No more than I am."

"Then he's a fraud, and if I can't get my money I'll tan his hide."

The farmer grew greatly excited, and moved a switch he carried in his hand ominously through the air.

Thus boded no good to Bragg.

"Just listen to me," said Jack. "My name is Dashley, and I am responsible. Your claim against Bragg is for this day only?"

"That's all, and I shall want a fi-pun' note."

"Five pounds. Very well. You shall have it. I happen to have that sum in my pocket, for my people sent me some money yesterday. Here it is. That will square everything."

"Yes; you've paid the man you shot, and this will square the cow and the rest of it."

The farmer took the money, which Jack's father had sent him to buy some pictures to adorn the walls of his room.

He wanted the pictures very much, but he preferred to wait a little while longer for them, thinking it was honourable to settle with the farmer.

A man is known by his companions,

and you cannot touch pitch without being defiled.

These are two very ancient but very true proverbs.

"Now," said Jack, "you and I are friends. Will you do me a good turn?"

"Yes, sir. What do you want me to do?" answered the farmer.

"Just go to Mr. Bragg, and expose him before me."

The farmer clapped his hands.

"I'll do it, sir," he said. "Blessed if I don't."

Jack went back to the parlour, and saw Owen Tudor and Bragg enjoying themselves over the lunch.

"Ah," said Bragg, "here you are, Jack! Come and enjoy yourself. We have been making a good lunch while you were away. I'm always the same; slap-bang and all alive."

"Thank you, I'm not hungry," replied Jack. "I'll wait till I get home."

"Oh, have something to eat. Don't be a hen; I always thought you were a cock bird."

"Excuse me, this time," said Jack.

Mr. Splawger came in and struck the table with a stick which he held in his hand.

"Now, my lord," he exclaimed. "What I want to know is, are you going to pay my bill?"

"When it is presented," replied Bragg. "Have you got it with you?"

"Here it is," said the farmer, exhibiting a sheet of foolscap.

Bragg took it and looked at it carefully as if he was adding up the items.

"Very good, Splawger," he exclaimed. "It shall be attested to."

"I want it attested to immediately."

"All right. Immediately, if not sooner," answered Bragg with a smile. "You know me."

"No I don't."

"Oh yes, you do, Splawger. Don't be in a hurry for your money. Gentlemen never pay down on the nail. Wait a little while and you can charge five per cent. interest, like the West-end tradesmen."

"I don't know nothin' about West-end tradesmen."

"Don't you? That's unfortunate for you; perhaps you belong to a co-operative store?"

"No I don't either, and I want my bill settled."

"You resemble a good many other people I know," said Bragg.

"Will you pay?"

"Not to-day, baker—I mean farmer. You can send in your account, or you can county court me. I'll slap-bang and all alive."

"You may be that, but are you Lord Coventry?" asked the farmer.

At this question Bill Bragg seemed to lose all his confidence; he looked at Owen and he looked at Jack.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Who said I was Lord Coventry?"

"Why, you did."

"Never," replied Bragg. "And I'll defy you to prove it. I said I was a friend of Lord Coventry's, came from the same county as he did and lived in the same house with him, but I never told you I was Lord Coventry."

The farmer flourished his bill in his face.

"Pay this," he said. "I want the money, and I mean to have it!"

"I can't at this moment. My name is Bragg, everyone knows me. Send it to the college in the usual course, and I will meet the obligation like an honourable man."

"That's what you say!"

"I mean what I say," cried Bragg, "and I am not in the habit of being insulted by common people like you."

"Call me common people?" cried the farmer.

"Well, old boy, you are but a noun of multitude, and therefore I don't think I could plural you."

"Get out of my place."

"I will as soon as I have finished this cheese," said Bragg. "It is not very good. I wonder you don't make butter."

Mr. Splawger was a man of good temper, but he could not stand too much impudence and he took Bragg by the collar.

"Come oot," he exclaimed.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Bragg. "Remember, if you have your remedy against me for false pretences, I have mine for assault, if you hurt me."

"I'll chance it," replied the farmer. He dragged him out of the room into

the yard, and dropped him into an empty sty.

"You dare to get out of that until I tell you," said the farmer, "and I'll kick you within an inch of your life."

"Excellent joke," replied Bragg, sitting down on the straw. "Splawger, you are like Yorick, a man of infinite jest and humour. I shouldn't wonder if you had often set the table in a roar."

"I ain't no Yorick," said the farmer, "I'm Splawger, that's my name."

"Bless you, old boy," answered Bragg. "You're a good sort and I like you."

"That's more than I do you."

"Simply because you don't know me. Give me your hand and help me out of this. I'm not a prize pig, and this isn't the cattle show, you know."

"Your friends may help you if they like; I shan't," replied the farmer.

He walked away, and as soon as his stalwart form was out of sight, Bill Bragg looked over the side of the sty.

"Jack! Owen!" he exclaimed. "Is old pumpkin head gone?"

"Yes, he's mizzled," answered Jack.

"Then I'll come out."

He jumped over the edge of the pig-sty and began to laugh.

"I'll go home. I've had enough of farms," he exclaimed. "Still we had our fun. I shall pay him some day."

"I have paid him already. So you owe it to me," remarked Jack.

"Really, that is very kind of you. I'll give you a cheque on a mud bank."

"Don't chaff," replied Jack. "I'm not in a hurry for the money, but I expect you to pay me as soon as you can."

"Of course I will."

Bill Bragg was perfectly happy. He had got out of the scrape much better than he had expected, and he never worried himself much about the future, the present was all that concerned him.

They returned to college, and reached their house about a quarter of an hour before dinner and went to their rooms.

Owen ran downstairs to get a book he had left in the pupils-room, and was talking to some fellows who were lounging in the passage.

While he was thus engaged a pretty little girl, wearing a red cloak, came in at the door and looked timidly around her.

"What do you want, miss?" asked Owen.

"Jack of Eton," she replied.

"What Jack is that? There are so many Jacks in the world."

"I don't know, except that he is tall and handsome."

"That is characteristic of all Etonians, if I may be accepted as a specimen," exclaimed Owen. "But I think I know who you mean."

"Oh yes, you were with him when he saved me from the stag. You are his friend; I remember you now."

"And you are Effie, the gipsy girl. Come with me, Effie."

Little Effie followed Owen up the stairs amid the comments of the boys.

"Deuced pretty girl," said one.

"Neat little filly," said another.

"Wonder what she can want with Dashley?" exclaimed a third.

Meanwhile Effie was conducted to Jack's room, and it may be easily supposed that he was greatly surprised at seeing her.

"You, Effie?" he cried. "What brings you here?"

"Love of you," she replied simply. "I feel as if I was your sister."

"You shall be my sister, and if I am your brother there is no harm in me kissing you, is there, dear?"

"No; you can kiss me if you like," said the gipsy girl.

She innocently held up her head and let him impress a tender caress on her baby-like face.

"Shut the door, Owen," exclaimed Jack, "and we will hear what Effie has come to tell us."

"It's a great secret, and I cannot tell you all," she observed.

"Never mind Owen. He is my chum, and I keep nothing from him."

"Very well, Jack of Eton," answered Effie. "You must not come to the forest any more, no matter who asks you."

"Why is that?"

"I cannot tell you, because I should be punished. If Ivan knew I had come here I think he would kill me."

"Would he? I should like to see him," said Jack indignantly.

"Ah, you don't know him. He is awful when you put him out. But promise me you will not go to the forest. Harm will come of it if you do."

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"GIVE IT TO HIM, MA'AM," CRIED JACK."

"All right, my little fairy," said Jack,
"I'll promise."

She seemed relieved at this compliance with her wish and turned to go.

"I must go now," she exclaimed. "I had such trouble to find you. I went to several houses and they all laughed at me when I asked for Jack of Eton—isn't that your name?"

"It's the name you've given me, Effie, but my real name is Jack Dashley."

"Well, I shall always call you Jack of Eton, and some day we shall meet again; but I shall not see you for a long time."

"Why not?"

She was about to reply when the door was violently opened, and Timor appeared on the threshold.

Effie looked very much alarmed at seeing him.

"Oh dear!" she cried. "Does he live here?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

"He will tell Ivan, and they will whip me. If I had known that I would not have come; and yet," she added, correcting herself, "I would, because it was for your sake, Jack of Eton."

Timor sprang forward angrily, and, seizing her by the arm, spoke to her in Russian in an excited manner, she answering him in the same language.

"Talk English," exclaimed Jack.

"I shall talk what I please, without asking you," replied Timor.

"No you won't; get out of my room, you rascally half-bred gipsy," cried Jack.

Timor took Effie to the door and said—

"Go back at once, and never dare to come here again."

Casting a warning look at Jack, the little girl skipped away, though the tears stood in her eyes, for Timor had evidently said something to her which had frightened her.

"Owen," exclaimed Jack, "run after Effie and see her clear of the college, the boys may chaff or worry her in some way."

Owen started after her, leaving Dashley and Timor face to face.

"What did that girl want here?" asked Timor.

"That's my business and hers. I certainly shan't think of telling you," replied Jack.

"I'll make you."

"No you won't. You are bigger than me, but I'll tell all the fellows about your uncle the gipsy, and the two fellows I saw in the yard the other night."

"A lot of good that will do you," replied Timor.

"I don't care what good it will do me, but I'll make a wager it won't do you much."

"Don't be cheeky."

"Keep away from me, that's all. I hate a Russian, and a gipsy is worse. Go and buy a tent and live out in the fields."

At this taunt Timor lost his temper, and he dealt Jack a box on the ear which knocked him up against the wall.

Jack returned the blow, and a fight began in which weight would tell, and, as a matter of course, Jack got the worst of it, though he punished his opponent considerably.

While the contest was going on Sutherland came into the room, having heard the noise of the conflict from the outside.

"Stop this!" he cried. "Do you bear me, Timor?"

The Russian had got Jack down in a corner, and was punching away at him as if he had been a sack of flour.

It was very lucky that Sutherland appeared on the scene when he did, for it really looked as if Timor would have killed him.

His temper had completely mastered him, and he did not seem to have the slightest control left.

"I'll kill him, the hound!" cried Timor.

Sutherland was more powerful than the Russian, and he seized him by the collar, throwing him on his back.

Jack was free, but he did not rise; he gasped for breath, and the blood poured from his nostrils.

"You great, big, ugly butcher!" exclaimed Sutherland. "I thought I warned you not to bully the lower boys."

"He called me names," answered Timor, getting up.

"Yes," said Jack, faintly, "I did. He's got gipsy blood in his veins. His uncle Ivan is the chief of the gipsies, and he helped his uncle Herne the Hunter

to rob this house the other night. I'm sure of it."

Timor affected to laugh.

"What rot, isn't it?" he said.

"Well, it does seem funny," replied Sutherland.

"I don't think he is quite right in his mind," continued Timor. "He has been reading about Herne the Hunter, and he can't think of anything else. Still, it is not nice to be called names. I am sorry I got irritated and lost my temper. He may say what he likes in future, and I will take no notice of it."

"That is the best way. We all know that you are a Russian gentleman," said Sutherland.

"A Russian thief, you mean," put in Jack.

"Shut up," replied Sutherland. "If you insult Timor like that I shall let him lick you."

"But it is true," Jack persisted.

"You see how he aggravates me," observed Timor. "My fingers itch to get at him. Let me knout him!"

He pulled his pet knout from his pocket.

It had been newly twisted and knotted.

"Not now," replied Sutherland.

"It will keep," remarked the Russian, casting a vindictive glance at Jack.

Sutherland took him by the arm and they quitted the room together, leaving Jack to sluice his face in a basin of cold water.

Scarcely had he finished removing the trace of the battle than Bill Bragg put his head in at the door.

"Who shot the cow? Ha, ha!" he cried.

"I rather think you did," replied Jack. "Look at my eye. Is it badly bunged up?"

"Closing rapidly. Who did that?"

"Timor, the beast. Do you know he's half a gipsy? The chief of the gipsies in Windsor forest is his uncle."

"Never!"

"It's true. Tell all the fellows, will you? I shan't go down to dinner with this eye."

"No; you'll have to stay out for a day or two. Timor a gipsy! I'll whack it about. Slap-bang and all alive!"

The bell rang for dinner, and the boys ran downstairs to the mid-day meal, Bill Bragg telling all the friends he met

about Timor having a gipsy for an uncle.

Boys are very fond of any little bit of scandal like that, and it swiftly went from one to the other, so that when Timor passed anyone he would hear a remark like this—

"I wouldn't be a gipsy."

Or—

"How would you like to live in a tent?"

Or—

"All gipsies are thieves."

He found the word "gipsy" written in his books if he left them for a moment on a table, and he was continually finding pieces of paper pinned to his back with the word "gipsy" written upon them.

All this was very annoying, and though he thrashed one or two boys whom he suspected of being his tormentors, it did not stop the annoyance.

He had to thank Jack Dashley for this, and Jack was rather proud of what he had done.

A week passed, and Jack's face was quite well.

He was quite respectful to Timor in his manner, he did his fagging quietly, and the latter could not find any pretext to quarrel with him; but for all that he hated him more and more every day, and was only biding his time.

As soon as Jack was well enough to go out, he went with Bragg and Owen to Mr. Soda's, having obtained permission to attend his evening classes.

They had about half a mile to walk up the Slough Road.

It was a moonlight night, and they had only just crossed over Fifteen-arch-bridge, when they saw a tall form, wrapped in a sheet, spring over the hedge into the road.

It stood looking at them for a moment, when it bounded into the air, cleared the hedge, and was seen springing over the meadow.

"What's that?" asked Jack, with his mouth wide open.

"Spring-heeled Jack," replied Bragg. "Have you never heard of him? I have often."

"Is it a ghost?" inquired Owen.

"Nobody knows what it is. I should like to catch it and just find out. Look: here it comes back again."

The thing he called Spring-heeled Jack was in reality crossing the field and returning to the road.

It moved like a kangaroo, in jumps, and no sooner had it touched the ground than up it went into the air, clearing a space of several feet.

It was tall and thin.

Its face seemed ghastly pale, but that was perhaps produced by the moonlight, and the sheet in which it was enveloped.

"I never saw such a funny thing!" exclaimed Jack. "And if it comes into the road again I'll try and catch it. You two stand in the place where you are now, I will hide under the hedge."

He did as he proposed, and Spring-

heeled Jack lighted over the hedge, not suspecting any mischief.

As he did so, Jack of Eton laid hold of his leg.

It was a solid, substantial, fleshy leg, and bore no resemblance to the unsubstantial support of a ghost.

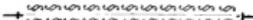
There was a struggle, but Jack held on like grim death, and eventually pulled off a thick heavy boot.

The ghost ran away, but he seemed lame, for he only jumped on one side, and could not go fast.

"After him!" shouted Jack. "Capture him!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Owen. "Let's give chase and run him to earth."

Owen and Bragg started up the road after the supposed ghost at a terrific pace.



CHAPTER XI.

A T M R . S O D A ' S .

THE mysterious figure which Dashley had so cleverly caught hold of could not run very well when deprived of one of its boots.

It was speedily captured by Owen and Bragg, who dragged it down in the road.

To make sure that it should not get up again, Bragg sat on it.

"Keep still, you varmint!" he exclaimed, "or I'll spiflicate you."

"Come on, Jack," said Owen. "We've got him."

Jack hastened to the spot, and immediately dragged off the other boot.

"Now you can let him get up," he cried.

The person rose to his feet and removed a mask from his face, disclosing, by the light of the gas lamp, the features of Jimmy Jingo, the boy whom Jack and Owen had met on their way to Eton, when Timor let loose Owen's bird.

"Is it you, Jimmy?" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes, you've bowled me out," replied Jimmy Jingo.

"What were you doing?"

"Spring-heeled Jack. It's no end of a dodge. I had the boots made for me. They've got awful big and strong springs in them. When you jump they send you flying into the air like a kite. Then

I put on the mask, and I took the sheet off my bed—it makes a lovely ghost—and I have sent everyone into fits, including the college policeman."

"You're a nice cup of tea, I don't think," replied Jack.

"I didn't know it was you, Dashley," said Jimmy, "or I wouldn't have done it."

"That's what you say."

"Give me the boots and let me get back."

"How did you get out?"

"I had a pass to go to the mathematical school."

"You shirked school and played ghost; that was very wrong. I shall confiscate these boots."

"What?" cried Jimmy, in a tone of dismay.

"The boots are mine, ditto mask, ditto sheet. It's my turn to do the ghost trick."

"Do you mean that?"

"Certainly."

Jimmy looked miserable, for he would have to walk back to college in the mud, having only his socks to protect his feet.

"I say," he exclaimed, "this is a beastly shame."

"I think it is a jolly lark."

Jack put on the boots, which fitted

him beautifully, and wrapping himself in the sheet, adjusted the mask.

"How do I look?" he asked.

"Regular castle spectre, good respectable old family ghost," replied Owen.

"You'll give me the togs again?" remarked Jimmy Jingo.

"When I've done with them," replied Jack. "Now you cut along home."

"Take care how you work the boots," said Jimmy.

"How do you mean?"

"You mustn't jump too high unless you want to go over something. It wants a lot of practice. I landed on the top of a house once, and had to sing out for a ladder to get down."

"Draw it mild."

"Well, you'll see, that's all."

Jack gave a jump and went bounding along up the road.

"Hip-hip and hurrah!" cried Owen. "Holloa, boys, here's another guy!"

"Follow him up," said Bragg.

"I hope he'll jolly well break his neck," he remarked. "I was a flat to let him catch me," cried Jimmy, looking after Jack.

As he went on, Jack found that there was a great deal of truth in Jimmy's advice, for the springs were very powerful, and the more he jumped the higher he went.

It was with great difficulty that he prevented himself from falling on his nose.

Extending his hands, he managed to keep his balance, but he had started too quickly on his wild career and could not stop himself.

Up went Jack, and no sooner had he come down than up he went again, higher than before.

He resembled the enterprising young gentleman who, mid snow and ice, bore a banner with the strange device "Ex-celsior."

"Stop me, Owen," he exclaimed.

"How?" asked Owen, who was running breathlessly after him.

"Hold me down."

"I can't catch you."

"Where's Bragg?"

"Not far off," said Bill. "I'm all slap-bang and all alive. Where are you trying to get to—the moon?"

"I'll be hanged if I know where I'm going," answered Jack.

Sometimes they heard his tones distinctly, and at others they seemed to be listening to some spirit in the air.

It was in vain they tried to catch him.

He defied all their efforts, like the giant who had the seven-league boots.

At length they saw him dart upwards like a projectile from a mountain gun, and he disappeared from their view altogether.

"Halloa, Jack, where are you?" cried Owen. "I can't afford to lose my chum in this way, you know."

"Up a tree," replied Jack, from the side of the road.

"Are you hurt?"

"I knocked my head going up, but I've lodged all right on a bough. Bother the boots. I'm going to take them off. I don't care who has the beastly things. If I hadn't landed in this old tree goodness only knows where I would have fetched up."

The boys could not help laughing, but Jack was in earnest.

Down fell first one boot and then the other.

"I'll have a try with them," said Bragg. "I'm a dab at spring heels. Why, I had a pair of boots like these years ago; they're nothing new."

He put them on, and Jack descended from his elevated position; but confident as Bragg appeared, he walked very slowly, not attempting to make any big jumps.

"Go slowly," he observed; "that's the way. Look how beautifully I manage. It's only a flat who goes up and down, doing the kangaroo business."

They had now reached the house in which Mr. Benjamin Soda dwelt.

It was an unpretending little cottage, standing in its own grounds, removed about twenty yards from the side of the road.

Mr. Benjamin Soda was a clever man, but he suffered from domestic infelicity.

His wife Maria, whom he called 'Ria, was a woman of uncertain temper as well as age.

The boys called her "old and bitter."

She wore glasses and she drank glasses.

In fact she was given to drink, and all her husband could do would not stop her.

When under the influence of her

favourite stimulant, brandy, she led Mr. Soda a dreadful life.

When not teaching he was reading; he was a bookworm, and had a great liking for poetry.

He frequently made quotations, and added force to his remarks by saying, "What are the words of the poet, my boy?" concluding with a line or two of an appropriate nature from some favourite author.

When the boys reached the house Jack said—

"I believe, Billy, you are in a funk."

"Am I?" replied Bragg.

"Yes; if you were not you would leap over the feuce and rap at old Brandy and Soda's window."

"I'll do it. Slap-bang and all alive!" answered Bragg.

He made a jump, and the wonderful boots carried him over the palings into the garden.

Up he went again, and his efforts to stop himself were fruitless, for he had to keep on bounding just as Jack had done when he once started on his mad flight.

The end of it was that he crossed the garden in three bounds, and went straight at the window and through it.

The casement was broken, and so was the glass.

Crash!

Mr. Soda was sitting at his table reading as usual when the accident happened, and the strange, ghost-like, sheeted, masked thing came abruptly to disturb his serenity.

"Good heavens!" he gasped.

Bragg knocked his head against the ceiling and came to a pause against the wall, for the simple reason that he could go no further.

"Oh, Lor'!" he said, as he rolled on the carpet.

"What are the words of the poet?" cried Mr. Soda. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us."

"It's all right, governor," said Bragg. "I'm not hurt."

"Who said you were?" replied the tutor. "What are you?"

"Bill Bragg, Etonian. Slap-bang and all alive! I've been doing Spring-heeled Jack, and it's knocked me into a hat."

"Really I do not understand."

At this juncture, Jack and Owen entered through the broken window and explained the mystery.

"This is very peculiar," said Mr. Soda, "and I may add very irregular. Take off that odd costume, sir."

Bragg obeyed, and the boots were minutely examined by Mr. Soda, who put them in a corner.

"These boots I shall keep," he exclaimed. "For what are the words of the poet, my boy?"

"I'm not good at riddles, sir," replied Bragg. "Ask me an easier one."

"It's not a riddle. The poet says—

'Whoever dare these boots displace,
Must meet Bombastes face to face.'

The sheet you can keep, also the mask."

"Does the poet say that?"

"No. That is what I say."

"Then I have to thank you for nothing," replied Bragg.

Mr. Benjamin Soda looked ruefully at the broken window, through which the inclement evening air made its way.

While he was thus engaged, his wife threw the door open and entered.

She had broken her leg some years before; it had left her lame, and she always walked with the aid of a crutch stick.

First of all she looked at the window, then at the boys, and finally at her husband.

"At it again," she cried.

"'Ria," replied her husband, "the damage you notice was caused by an accident which I deeply deplore."

"Mr. B.," she continued.

"Mrs. S.," he replied.

"Brandy and soda," exclaimed Bragg. "A very good combination."

Mrs. Soda raised her stick and bit Bragg a blow on the shoulder which caused him to roll into a chair.

"Perhaps you'll shut your mouth after that," she said.

"Yes, mum," replied Bragg. "That's enough for me. I don't want any more. I'm not a hog, I assure you."

She turned disdainfully from him to her unfortunate husband, and glared at him through her spectacles.

"Twig the giglamps," muttered Bragg.

"My dear," said Mr. Soda, nervously, "do not fix your gaze on me in that threatening manner. What are the words of the poet?"

"Bother the poet."

"He speaks of the eye in a sweet frenzy rolling."

"I'm not sweet."

"It would be rude to contradict you, my angel, for your aspect somewhat resembles vinegar at the present moment."

"Oh, you brute! I'll beat you more for that than anything," she roared, as she raised her crutch.

Mr. Soda retreated to the wall, and raised his arm to protect himself.

"Ria, don't you do it," he exclaimed.

"Won't I? Wait till you see. What did you break the window for?"

"I didn't break it."

"Who did, then?" she demanded.

"One of the boys."

"Which one? Point him out. I believe you only want to make a scapegoat of him. I suppose you couldn't find a word in the dictionary and you lost your temper, as you always do, and threw the book at the window. Oh, my, if you did, I'll beat you more for that than anything."

"My dear, I didn't. It was Spring-heeled Jack."

"Who's he?"

Jack had been an attentive and an amused spectator of this curious scene between husband and wife, and he quietly slipped on the sheet and the mask.

"Behold him!" he exclaimed, stretching out his hand.

Mrs. Soda shrank back aghast.

"The saints defend us!" she cried.

"What are you?"

"An avenging spirit."

"What do you want of me?"

"Down on your knees and beg your husband's pardon or your time has come."

"Good spirit, I do not understand you," she said, trembling.

"Obey me, or I will carry you away into the realms of space."

"Spare me."

"To your husband!" cried Jack. "On your knees, quick! I am a demon."

"Good demon, be merciful."

"Apologise—quick! The cavernous recesses of the mountains of the moon yearn for your worthless carcass. Trifle not with me! You shall delve in the mines for all eternity if—"

"No, no! I will do as you bid me."

Mrs. Soda sank on her knees and crawled to her husband, assuming a most abject demeanour.

"I am very sorry," she said.

"That is not enough," cried Jack.

"What more do you require?"

"Go on. It is not for me to dictate, but for you to speak. Dread my wrath if—"

"Oh, I'll do anything, dear demon," cried Mrs. Soda. "Benjamin, I'll never do so any more. I'll burn my crutch. Forgive your wretched wife and drive away the fiend."

Mr. Soda clasped her in his arms as he raised her from the floor.

"Now you are my own precious pet," he said.

"More brandy and soda--B. and S. for ever!" exclaimed Bill Bragg. "Go it! Slap-bang and all alive!"

"What are the words of the poet?" remarked Mr. Soda. "'Love has charms to soothe the savage breast.'"

"What! Call me a savage?" asked Mrs. Soda.

"No; I'm the—a—the savage, my dear. It is I who am soothed."

Jack threw off the sheet and burst into a loud fit of laughter, in which his companions could not help joining.

"Ha! Deceived! Tricked!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, my love. A little innocent device of Dashley's," answered her husband.

"And you knew it?"

"Well, I knew it wasn't a ghost."

"Oh, you beast! I'll beat you more for that than anything," she said, attacking him with her crutch, and giving him a sound thrashing, which he in vain endeavoured to prevent.

She only left off when the stick fell from her hand, and Mr. Soda was allowed to take refuge behind an arm-chair, where he rubbed his back and bald head.

"You villain!" she said.

Then she looked round and glared at the boys.

"Do any of you want a little punishment?" she asked.

"Thank you, ma'am," replied Jack, politely; "at the present moment I am not a candidate for your agreeable favours."

"My what?"

"I am sure that you are quite a lady,

and that you wouldn't so far lower yourself as to commit an assault upon a stranger. Your husband belongs to you. He is, in a manner of speaking, your property."

"Of course he is."

"No doubt," added Jack, in the same polite strain, "he likes a little mild correction."

"No he don't," growled Mr. Soda.

"Oh yes you do, sir. You are used to it, as the eels get used to skinning. It does you good."

"She's been drinking," replied Mr. Soda.

"B. and S.," put in Bragg.

Mrs. Soda picked up her crutch and shook it threateningly at him.

"What are the words of the poet?" continued Mr. Soda, who felt himself comparatively safe behind the chair.

"Another riddle. Give it up," said Bragg.

"The poet says—'Why should a man put an enemy in his mouth to steal away his brains?'"

"Hurrah for the poet!" cried Bragg,

"Young man," said Mrs. Soda, "if you don't shut your mouth, as I advised you before, I'll make an example of you."

"Hit him hard, ma'am; he's got no friends," remarked Jack.

"Come, I say, Jack," cried Bragg, "you're getting it up for me."

"He's a very nice gentlemanly young fellow," said Mrs. Soda, "and I like him better than any one I have seen here."

Jack bowed in recognition of the compliment.

"You are a perfect lady, ma'am," he answered. "It is a pleasure to meet and know you. What says the poet, as Mr. Soda observes? 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.' Mr. Soda, ma'am, don't know what a treasure he has got in you."

Mrs. Soda sighed deeply.

"That's what I often and often tell him," she rejoined.

"If you were laid in the cold, cold grave, he'd miss you, ma'am."

"Indeed he would."

"I'd give her an elegant funeral," said Mr. Benjamin Soda pathetically.

His wife raised her crutch and shook it at him.

"What, you wretch?" she cried.

"I didn't mean anything, 'Ria. Put

that stick down. I won't give you an elegant funeral if you don't like it."

"What will you do then?"

"I'll—I'll let the parish bury you. Plain deal coffin, my dear, hearse and mourning carriage all in one. No mutes, no plumes—this style, one pound two and six."

"Oh, Benjamin!"

"Cheap as dirt, my dear."

"Yes, and twice as nasty. How dare you talk to me in that way? I'll beat you more for that than anything."

"If you go on in that way I shall lose all my pupils."

"Serve you right too."

"Ruin stares me in the face, 'Ria."

"Let her stare," replied Mrs. Soda, putting her arms akimbo.

Mr. Soda turned to the boys with an appealing look.

"Young gentlemen," he exclaimed, "I dismiss you for this evening. We will study the lovely odes of Horatius Flaccus and the splendid verse of the bard of Mantua to-morrow, for what are the words of the poet? 'What can't be cured must be endured.'"

Mr. Soda was a philosopher.

The boys put on their hats and prepared to go.

"Ain't you going to teach to-night?" asked his wife.

"No, my dear; not being a machine, I cannot stand this excitement. I shall shortly be a bankrupt. We shall not be able to pay our butcher, our baker, or our candlestick-maker. You will see me the inmate of a debtor's prison, and then you will weep, but it will be too late."

"Catch me weeping," she replied. "I am not one of that sort."

"Crocodiles, my love, sometimes shed tears."

"Oh, you unfeeling wretch! Call me a crocodile?"

"Yes, I did," said Mr. Soda, making a stand.

"You will repent this. I'll beat you more for that than anything."

"Do it," he replied, manfully. "What are the words of the poet? 'A time will come.' Ha, ha!"

Mrs. Soda clutched her stick and rushed at her liege lord and protector, who crept under the chair.

"Give it him, ma'am," said Jack.

"It's a shame to see an amiable creature like you treated in this way."

"He does aggravate me," replied Mrs. Soda.

"You have my sincere sympathy, madam."

"Thank you, Mr. Dashley. It is something to have one friend. Oh, won't I let him have it presently. I only wish he'd come from under that chair. The coward!"

Mr. Soda would have preferred to remain in the secluded position he had chosen, no matter how undignified it was, if his better half had permitted him to do so, but she conceived the brilliant idea of dragging away the chair.

He was revealed on his hands and knees, as if he was giving a "back" at leap-frog.

Thwack! thwack! went the stick, and "Oh, oh!" roared the unlucky school-teacher.

"Stop it, 'Ria!" he cried. "Drop it, I say. Help, help!"

Bill Bragg stepped forward and attempted to seize the angry lady by the arm.

She, however, turned her wrath upon him, and he received several blows on the back and shoulders.

"You want some of it, do you?" she exclaimed. "I've enough for all of you. Take that, and that, and that!"

"Sorry I spoke," replied Bragg. "Oh, Lor', don't she hurt?"

"I mean to."

"Turn it up. It ain't good enough.

Oh, what are you up to, 'Ria? I'm off; good-night, boys."

He made a dash for the window.

"Hoop-la! Slap-bang and all alive!" he added, as he disappeared through the broken casement.

Mrs. Soda, however, had now got thoroughly aroused, and she followed him.

"For this relief much thanks," murmured Mr. Benjamin Soda. "What are the words of the poet, my boys? 'All's well that ends well.'"

"Perhaps she will pitch into us, sir, now she's got her back up," said Jack.

"It would not surprise me in the least. In fact, nothing that that remarkable woman does, has done, or may do, surprises me," replied Mr. Soda.

"I think we'll be off."

"Don't desert me altogether," said the professor. "This sort of thing does not occur every day, you know."

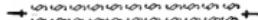
"Oh, we'll come again, sir, no fear. It's as good as a circus; I rather like it."

"I don't want to lose my pupils."

"Certainly not. Good-night, sir," answered Jack.

He and Owen quitted the house without encountering Mrs. Soda, but in their agitation they took the wrong turning, and instead of going back to college, they went towards Datchet.

There were some lights in a large house, and also a lamp in the window of the porter's lodge, so Jack stopped, thinking it advisable to ask the way.



CHAPTER XII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

"I'm afraid we're lost," said Jack.

"So am I," answered Owen; "for I don't recognise this road at all. Shan't we catch it if we are late for the lock-up?"

"I shall, for old Dryasdust is down upon me ever since his book was burnt."

This was true.

Mr. Dryasdust never lost an opportunity of punishing Jack Dashley for the smallest offence.

"What a shame that was," remarked

Owen. "I wish we could find out who did it."

"Timor's the man, only I can't prove it. How I hate that fellow!"

"It's wrong to hate anybody," said Owen; "but I must admit I don't love him."

"Nor anybody else. How could they? Suppose we inquire where we are?"

"All right. Go ahead!" answered Owen.

They went to the lodge and knocked

at the door, which was opened by a strong powerful man, who smiled grimly when he saw the boys.

"Please, which is the way to Eton?" asked Jack.

The porter looked knowingly at them, and beckoned them inside.

"Step in," he exclaimed. "I'll tell you."

Unsuspectingly they walked in, although they thought there was something odd in the man's manner.

The door was instantly closed behind them and locked.

"Holloa!" cried Jack, "what is the meaning of this?"

"So you've come back?" said the porter.

"Back! Why we've never been here before."

"That's all my eye. Step across the yard; you'll find Greenwood there, and he'll talk to you."

"Perhaps you will have the kindness to explain this strange conduct," said Jack. "We are Eton boys who have lost our way."

"Tell that to the marines. Get into the yard. Step lively now!" replied the porter.

He opened another door and let them have entrance to a yard, in which they saw a man with a big dog.

"Here's the runaways, Bill," cried the porter.

"Hey?" replied the man addressed as Bill. "I'm glad of that, for I was thinking of sending the dog after them. He can go to his kennel now."

The porter closed the door of his lodge, and Bill Greenwood proceeded to fasten the dog by a chain to a staple in the wall.

Jack and Owen looked curiously at one another.

"Here's a go," said Jack. "We're in for something funny."

"I can't make it out," remarked Owen. "This can't be a private school, can it?"

"Blest if I know. All I can understand is that two boys have disappeared, and that we are supposed to be the boys come back," replied Jack.

"Perhaps it will come all right when we talk to the fellow with the dog," Owen suggested.

They waited anxiously until the man came up to them, and it must be con-

fessed that their hearts beat a little quicker than usual.

"Well, Jack, how do you find yourself by this time?" asked Bill, as he approached.

"He knows my name," thought Jack.

"You're Jack the Giant-killer, you know. How many giants have you killed?"

"Oh, about a dozen," Jack replied, thinking the man must be mad.

"And how is the state of the health of the Bottle Imp?"

"Who's that?"

"Why, your friend there. Oh, you're a couple of nice chums, you are. Come, now, tell us how you got out."

Jack was rapidly becoming bewildered.

He looked at the man in a state almost bordering on despair.

"Answer me now, or I'll lick you," cried Bill.

He raised his hand as if he fully meant what he said, and Jack deemed it prudent to say something.

"It was through the window," he exclaimed.

"Blowed if I didn't think so. It's my firm opinion that you would get through the keyhole if you wanted to. Do you want any supper?"

"Well, we haven't had any."

"I'll bring you some bread and cheese and a bit of cold meat, though it is more than you deserve, for you've given us a lot of trouble. There's two of our chaps scouring the country for you now, but as you've come back and given yourselves up, I'll strain a point and humour you a little."

"Who are we?" asked Jack.

"Now, ain't that funny?" laughed the man. "You can be sensible enough at times, and yet you can't recollect where you live."

"You've made a mistake," Jack said. "We are Eton boys, and—"

"Oh, yes, you can stash all that. I know you, Jack the Giant-killer, as well as I do the Bottle Imp."

"I think it is very rude of you to call me a bottle imp," said Owen.

"That's what you think you are; of course we know you ain't anything of the sort."

"For goodness sake tell me where I am," pleaded Jack.

"If it will do you any good I will tell

you. This is Doctor Masham's private lunatic asylum, and you two are our insane boys, Jack the Giant-killer and the Bottle Imp. I'll put you in with the Idiot of the Mountain to-night, and you can go to your own rooms to-morrow."

Here was a pleasant announcement for the boys, who suddenly found that they were supposed to be two escaped lunatics who had got out of the asylum.

It was curious that they should have asked their way at the porter's lodge, just where they were wanted.

The darkness which prevailed in the yard prevented the keeper from scrutinising their faces completely, or he might have found out the mistake.

He conducted them to a room at the entrance of the building and pushed them in.

"The Idiot of the Mountain won't hurt you," he said; "he is harmless. I'll bring your supper presently."

"Won't you tell the doctor I want to see him?" cried Jack.

"I'll tell him, but I don't think he'll come before the morning, and when he does it's just as likely as not he'll order you to be whipped, so I wouldn't be in a hurry if I was you."

"I have something of importance to communicate to him."

"It'll keep, won't it? What is it? Something about the number of giants you killed or the imps you bottled?"

"No; it's a secret to all but the doctor."

"Well, I'll tell him," replied the keeper, shutting the door.

On a bed in a corner was sleeping an old man whom the boys did not think it advisable to wake up.

They sat down and looked gloomily at each other.

No wonder they did so.

If the doctor would not see them they might be kept for days in the asylum, and have the misery of being soundly whipped for their supposed running away.

It was anything but a pleasing prospect.

The boys who had really escaped were two lads of weak intellect who had read fairy stories until one thought he was the veritable Jack the Giant-killer and the other the Bottle Imp.

In the fireplace a small fire was burn-

ing, and it cast a ruddy glow around the ill-furnished apartment.

Suddenly the old man on the bed woke up and looked around him.

"Ha! who have we here?" he exclaimed. "Two poor friendless boys as I am alive. I would relieve your necessities if I could, believe me. I sympathise with you from the bottom of my heart."

"We don't want your sympathy," said Owen.

"Indeed! Have we then independent beggars who have amassed a fortune in their mendicant career? 'Tis well."

"Shut up, you old fool!" exclaimed Jack.

"What, am I, the only real and genuine and original Idiot of the Mountain, to be derided by two beardless boys? Forbid it, heaven, and the shades of those who suffer wrong and have their woes."

He seized a chair, and throwing it down, jumped on it, which caused it to break in pieces.

Grasping a leg of the chair, he brandished it in the air and danced wildly around the apartment.

"Ha, ha!" he cried. "The old man with the grey beard came to me in my sleep and he said—

"Idiot of the Mountain, you must kill a boy to-night."

"I will do more. I will kill two boys."

Jack did not like this threat, and he retreated to the door, the handle of which he tried.

It was locked.

"Confound it," he said, "we cannot get out. What is to be done with the lunatic?"

"Floor him," replied Owen.

The crazy man heard what they said and became the more angry.

"Lunatic!" he cried. "I'd have you know I am as sane as you are, and only kept here by the cupidity of my relations, who want to gain possession of my property. I own the mountain. It is mine! Alas, they have stolen it!"

He dropped the weapon with which he had armed himself and burst into tears.

"Cheer up, old 'un," said Jack. "There are no doubt brighter days in store for you."

"Never!" he answered.

Then he fell on his knees, throwing himself at Jack's feet, and putting on a beseeching air, folded his hands.

"Give, oh, give me back my mountain," he exclaimed.

"Your request shall be attended to," answered Jack.

"It's no good to you," urged the idiot. "You don't know where the treasure is concealed."

"No, I don't."

"Restore to me my mountain, and I will bestow upon you gifts of gold and precious stones. Kind sir, bear my petition in mind. You are one of the commissioners. I know you in spite of your disguise. Ha, ha!"

"All I can do for you I will. Where is the mountain?"

"I generally carry it on my back, but they have taken it away and put it in the spare room."

"Then it won't be difficult to get it?"

"Not at all. And if you don't do it," said the idiot, "I will have you for dinner to-morrow, boiled or roasted, I don't know which yet."

"I think I'd rather be roasted," replied Jack, wishing to humour him. "I generally am roasted, and people say I taste best that way."

"Very well, you shall be roasted, and I'll have you with mint sauce. You know me, don't you? I'm the only brother of the King of the Cannibal Islands. You must be killed now, though. Prepare to die!"

The poor creature was becoming

violent again, and a second time he seized the leg of the broken chair, rushing upon Jack.

Seeing it was necessary to defend themselves, the boys possessed themselves of the remaining fragments, and a fierce battle would have ensued had not the door suddenly opened, admitting the keeper and a benevolent-looking man.

This proved to be the doctor.

"Seize the old fellow," he cried. "You ought to have known that this was his bad time."

The keeper secured the lunatic, and the doctor looked at the boys.

"I don't know you," he continued. "Certainly you are not the lads who have run away. Who are you, and how did you come here?"

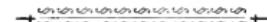
Jack explained the mistake which the porter had made, and the doctor expressed his regret that such an error should have happened.

"It is fortunate I came to see you," he said, "for you will get in time for lock-up now. I will send you home in my own carriage, and, if you like, write a letter to your tutor."

Jack thanked him, and he and Owen were conducted to a waiting-room while the horses were being harnessed and put to the carriage.

In a short time they were on the way home, and arrived safely at Mr. Dryasdust's, not at all sorry to escape from the Idiot.

Mr. Dryasdust did not say anything to them, and they hastily got up their lessons for the next day.



CHAPTER XIII.

JACK GETS INTO TROUBLE.

In the private garden of Mr. Dryasdust was a large wooden house, in which that gentleman kept a large quantity of valuable golden pheasants.

It was the time of year when they laid, and the eggs were sometimes cooked for their owner's breakfast.

Jack saw some going out of the kitchen, and being informed by the cook what they were, conceived a strong desire to have some.

From the window of his room he could see the pheasantry, and often cast longing eyes in their direction.

He did not think his tutor required all, and he one night let himself out of the window by means of a sheet, and possessed himself of half-a-dozen.

The next morning, when fagging was over, he proceeded to cook them, Owen Tudor taking as much interest in the operation as he did.

"I wonder what they will taste like?" said Owen. "I've eaten almost all kinds of eggs, except pheasants."

"They're bound to be good, or old Dryasdust wouldn't patronize them," replied Jack. "Take one, old man—they're done."

He had removed the saucepan from the fire, and was about to give his friend some of the eggs.

When, oh horror! he saw his tutor standing before him.

It was a favourite custom of Mr. Dryasdust to walk about the house with list slippers on, and look in at the boys' rooms to see how they were going on and what they were doing.

"Oh Lor', old Dryasdust!" he exclaimed.

"Is much obliged to you for the kind and complimentary way in which you speak of him. What have you got there?"

Jack saw that there was a look of suppressed malignity in his eye.

In fact the opportunity he had been looking for had come at last. He had never liked Jack since the destruction of his manuscript, of which he believed him to be guilty, and he felt that he would like to punish him if he could.

This was not exactly fair, but perhaps it was natural under the circumstances.

"What have I got?" replied Jack. "Nothing sir."

"Nothing?"

"Only a little boiling water."

"Don't tell me any falsehoods," cried the tutor, taking the saucepan from him and inspecting the contents. "Ha!" he added, "pheasants' eggs. Where did you get these?"

"I found them, sir."

"Where?"

Jack saw it was useless to prevaricate, for he could not escape from the dilemma in which he was placed.

"The fact is, sir, I took them out of your pheasantry. I thought you were eating too many, and I was anxious about your health; besides, I did not think you would miss them."

A gleam of satisfaction appeared on Mr. Dryasdust's face.

"Do you consider it gentlemanly to steal my property?" he asked.

"Steal!" repeated Jack, indignantly.

"Yes, I repeat what I said. He who

takes that which is not his, commits a crime—in fact, he is a thief, and the law condemns him."

Jack put his hand in his pocket and produced half-a-sovereign, which he threw down on the table.

"There, sir; I think you will confess you could not eat all the eggs, so I will give you a fair price for what I have in the pot. I don't know what the things are worth, but I suppose that will pay you for them, sir; consider I have bought them."

"It's too late. If I took that money I should be compounding a felony; of course I could send for a policeman and have you locked up. You would be sent to prison and ruined for life. I shall not adopt that course."

Jack was completely dumbfounded.

"I only bagged the eggs for a lark, sir," he said.

"A lark!" repeated his tutor.

"Yes; I did not know you set such store by them. I'm very sorry; if you won't take the money, I'll buy you some more if I can get them in the town."

"Dashley!" exclaimed Mr. Dryasdust, impressively, "I am afraid you are a very bad boy."

"Why, sir?"

"There was that affair of the manuscript, the loss of which has nearly broken my heart."

"But I didn't burn it, sir."

"Suspicion pointed to you. I have not accused you of the offence, but I now find that you have robbed my pheasantry, and I shall complain of you to the head master, the consequence of which will be that you will be birched."

"Look over it this time, sir," said Jack. "I did not mean any harm when I took the pheasants' eggs, and really I thought at times you were beginning to flap your arms about like a pheasant's wings and fancying yourself a bird, through eating so many eggs, but forgive me this time."

"It's impossible," answered the tutor.

He left the room after saying this, and Jack was left staring at Owen Tudor, who sympathised deeply with his chum.

"Who'd have thought of his coming in

the room like that?" exclaimed Jack. "In another ten minutes the beastly old eggs would have been all eaten. It wasn't stealing, Owen, was it, no more

than taking apples is? We didn't want to make a profit on the things; it was for the fun of the thing, and just to see how they tasted."

"I was in it as much as you," replied Owen, "for I let you down out of the window."

After some little reflection, Jack made up his mind how to act.

"My tutor," he said, "ought not to have talked to me in the way he did; evidently he does not like me, he never has liked me, since that affair of the book, and I won't stand it."

"You will have to see the head master," remarked Owen.

"I won't."

"What will you do, then?"

"Run away!" replied Jack.

"You'll get caught and be brought back. If you go home your father won't keep you there, for you have told me he is a stern man and fond of discipline."

"I shan't go home, I'll enlist sooner."

"How can you?" said Owen, who had all the sterling sense of a Welshman; "you are not old enough or big enough to go for a soldier."

"I might be a drummer boy," replied Jack reflectively.

"Don't think of it, old boy; I speak as your chum, and I have a right to advise you."

"I admit that."

"Very well, then, grin and bear it. You are not the first Eton boy who has been birched."

"But I don't deserve it."

"Yes you do; plainly speaking, you had no right to take the eggs. If we will do things that are wrong, we must take the consequences."

"I won't submit to it!" exclaimed Jack, putting on his hat. "Good-bye, old fellow."

Owen Tudor was astonished.

"Where are you going?" he asked. "It isn't time for morning school yet."

"I know that."

"If you are not at school there will be a hue and cry after you. Come, Jack, be reasonable," urged Owen.

"I'll try."

"It's all I want, but what's your little game?"

"I scarcely know myself yet, but I'll not be flogged, and you'll see that I

mean what I say. Ta-ta, old boy; I'll write to you."

Owen grew alarmed at Jack's manner, for he saw he was very much in earnest, and he feared that he would do something desperate.

In fact, Jack was proud and determined, and he felt that he would rather do anything than be flogged.

"I say, Jack," cried Owen, "you are not going to leave me in this way?"

"Why not, dear boy? I've said good-bye."

"That's all right; I know that. But we are chums. Tell me where you are going."

"Will you keep it a secret? Honour bright?"

"Yes, indeed. Do you think that I would say anything that would get you into trouble?"

"Well, then, I'll tell you. I mean to go to Windsor forest and ask the gipsies to let me hide with them."

"You do?"

"It's a fact. If Mr. Dryasdust asks you where I am, you must not let him know, though you can tell him you can bring me back if he won't punish me in the way he threatens."

"But look here, Jack," said Owen; "you remember what little Effie said?"

"Her warning, you mean?"

"I do. She came here expressly to tell you not to venture into Windsor forest because danger awaited you."

"Oh," said Jack, laughing, "that is only some of Timor's threats, and I'm not afraid of the Tartar."

"It may be something else."

"I'll risk it, anyhow. Effie likes me, and from what I've seen of them, the gipsies are not a bad sort. They will give me shelter."

"Suppose Timor goes there to see his uncle?" suggested Owen.

"Then the game is up, and I shall have to go somewhere else."

"Jack, don't do it. Danger is before you. I speak as a friend."

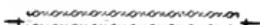
"I know you do, Owen, and I respect you for it," replied Jack. "But Mr. Dryasdust shall not tyrannise over me, or any other man. You know where to find me. Come up after four."

"I'll come to-morrow," said Owen. "Perhaps the gipsies won't have you or you may think better of it."

"Not I. Once more, old fellow, farewell," replied Jack, jocularly. "It may be for years, and it may be for ever; yet if for ever, fare thee well."

Owen saw it was useless to try and

persuade him, and Jack left the house, walking rapidly up town to seek Effie among the gipsies, little caring for whatever danger surrounded him there.



CHAPTER XIV.

GUNSTOCK'S DANGER.

SEVERAL times, as Jack was going up the High Street of Eton, he had a mind to turn back, but his obstinate nature would not permit him.

He thought he was about to be unjustly punished, and determined not to submit to it.

Stopping at a confectioner's, he went inside and made a hearty lunch of cakes, tarts, and buns, filling up with an ice and some stewed pears with cream.

"I shan't starve," he said, to himself, "and it's a good deal better than those beastly old pheasants' eggs which got me into all this trouble."

Walking on briskly again he soon reached Windsor Park, and quitting the Long Walk to avoid observation, dived among the trees.

When he had traversed the park for about the length of a mile, he met Gunstock, the keeper, who was leaning on his gun, and contemplating the skin and horns of a deer.

"Holloa, Gunstock!" cried Jack. "What cheer?"

"Little enough, sir," replied the keeper.

"You look as melancholy as if you had all the sins of the world on your shoulders."

"Somebody's been a-killing of the deer, and I can't find out who it is. My opinion is that the gipsies does it, and if I could only spot one of them, I'd make it hot for them," said Gunstock, savagely.

"What would you do? Lock him up?"

"That's no use," the keeper answered, in a tone of disgust. "The Roosian gang has got some friend at Court. I've heard that the Roosian ambassador interferes on their behalf."

"Really?"

"Fact," Gunstock said.

"How do you know that?"

"Well, I don't absolutely know it; but the other day I caught a gipsy with two fine hares and I lugs him off to the castle for orders."

"Well?"

"It wasn't well, it was bad. The ranger sent word that I was to let him go, and not interfere with the poor gipsies in future."

"That is hard on you," said Jack.

"No matter; I'll have it out of the first one I catch a-doing anything. Look at that skin and them horns."

"I see them."

"Very well. Is it in human nature, especially a gamekeeper's human nature, to stand that?"

"I don't think I should like it."

"Like it, sir! You'd hate it quite as much as I do. Why, much as I and my daughter Sybil—her mother's dead, rest her soul—like a bit of venison, I'd never take the liberty of killing so much as a fawn, and it's only when the prince or the royal dukes come to hunt, and I have the quartering of the game, that a few slices of deer-meat find their way to my table, yet those furriners, those confounded Roosian gipsies, can do as they like."

"I think I can explain it," said Jack.

"How?"

"They have a friend at court. Ivan, the chief, is the brother of the most important member of the Muscovite Embassy."

"Indeed! Well, I'll Ivan him if I catch him."

Gunstock gave the skin of the deer a kick, as if to show what he would do to the first live Russian who offended him.

"What brings you up here at this time of the day, Master Dashley?" asked the keeper.

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"STAY, MY LOVE, I KNOW THIS YOUNG GENTLEMAN," CRIED MR. SODA."

"Oh, I don't know exactly," replied Jack, evasively.

"I thought," continued Gunstock, "that Eton boys weren't allowed out till after twelve?"

Jack wondered if he could trust the keeper with his secret.

One glance at his open, honest countenance convinced him that he could.

"I've run away," he said.

Gunstock stared at him in surprise.

"What's that for," he demanded, "if I may make so bold?"

"I had a little trouble with my tutor, and he wanted to have me flogged. He's made a dead set at me. It's all spite, and I would not submit to it."

"You don't look like a bad boy, sir."

"I'm not perfect, but I try to be as good as I can."

"I don't hold with this flogging system," said Gunstock, thoughtfully; "but I suppose the college masters know best. It does not seem the right way to treat a gentleman. What are you going to do now?"

"Try and find a shelter somewhere."

"My cottage is close by here," exclaimed Gunstock. "You can see the smoke curling up through the trees. Sybil is cooking a bit of dinner. It's only a humble place, yet if you like to come there I can give you a shake-down."

Jack was touched by his liberality.

"Thank you very much," he answered. "I am sure you would make me very comfortable at your diggings."

"That I would, sir. Will you come?"

"I am afraid I shall have to decline at present, as I have another plan in view," replied Jack.

"Just as you please. The door will be always open to you."

He thought Gunstock looked the least little bit annoyed at his refusal, and he did not like to tell him that he intended to ask the gipsies for shelter, as the keeper hated them so cordially.

"Perhaps you may see me before long, old man," he remarked. "There is no telling."

Suddenly a fine buck shot through the bushes and the ferns as if pursued by some one, and in another moment a large black hound was seen close at its heels.

Directly afterwards a shot was heard,

and the deer leaped into the air, made a few convulsive bounds, and fell down dead.

"My word!" cried Gunstock; "who's that?"

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips than the tall commanding form of Ivan the gipsy appeared.

His gun was on his arm, and one barrel still smoking, showed that it had been recently discharged.

"How dare you shoot that stag?" cried Gunstock.

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," replied Ivan, haughtily.

"Give up that gun."

Ivan smiled sarcastically.

"Which end will you have?" he asked, pointing significantly to the muzzle.

"I am not at all particular," answered Gunstock.

Gunstock was quite angry, and his face grew red.

Advancing to the gipsy, he extended his hand as if to seize the gun, when the Russian slipped back.

"Beware!" he exclaimed.

Gunstock threw his own gun on the grass.

"An Englishman's as good as a Russian any day," he said, "and perhaps better. If I can't lock you up, I'll take your weapon, and learn you to respect my authority. I ain't been keeper here goin' on seventeen years for nothing, I can tell you."

Jack saw from Gunstock's determined manner that there was going to be a desperate struggle.

At the same time he thought of the gipsy's warning the first time they had met, and how pretty little Effie had prophesied that the keeper would have his blood shed before long.

"Take care!" he said.

"Why should I take care? Let him look out for himself," Gunstock replied.

"Leave Ivan alone, I implore you."

"Not I."

Jack seized him by the arm, but the herculean keeper cast him off as if he had been a babe, and he went staggering off until he fell some distance in the ferns.

Then the keeper attacked the gipsy, and as Jack regained his feet he saw them engaged in a fierce contest.

Gunstock was determined to possess himself of Ivan's weapon, and the latter was equally resolved that he should not have it.

They swayed to and fro like young poplars in a storm.

It was impossible to decide on which side the advantage lay, for they were equally matched as regards strength.

The keeper had one arm round Ivan's neck, and with the other he grasped the muzzle of the gun.

All at once there was a report.

Jack could not see much more than two misty, indistinct forms owing to the smoke, but when that cleared off he noticed that Gunstock's grip relaxed, and he fell to the ground with a deep groan.

The gun had gone off during the struggle, but whether Ivan had purposely discharged it or not he could not say.

"Good heaven!" he exclaimed, rushing to the spot, "you have killed him."

"It isn't so bad as that, I hope," replied Ivan. "I don't want to be tried for killing a rascally *garde de chasse*."

"I call it infamous," continued Jack.

"Don't say anything, Master Dashley," remarked the keeper. "He didn't do it on purpose. I'll say that for him."

"How do you know?"

"It was a pure accident. I saw how he was a-holding the gun, and he couldn't have pulled the trigger if he had tried to."

"Thank you; this is more generous than I expected," said Ivan. "And I beg you, young gentleman, to remember those words in case there should be an inquest."

"I will do what is right," answered Jack.

Gunstock groaned again as if he was suffering extreme pain.

"I'm a square man," he went on, "and I'll say nothing agin nobody but what's true. If I die it was an accident."

Ivan stooped down and examined him carefully.

"The charge has lodged in your right shoulder, man," he said. "You may lose your arm, but you will not die. Where do you live?"

"Hard by here. Oh, my poor girl Sybil. It will be the death of her to see her father brought home wounded.

Curse you and all your tribe. I'll be reveng'd for this some day."

Ivan's only reply to this was to take the burly keeper in his arms, making no more ado of his heavy burden than if he had been a child, and holding him tenderly, he carried him to the cottage, Jack running on ahead.

There was a bedroom on the ground floor, and he placed him on the bed without any ceremony.

Hearing the noise of footsteps, a pretty girl, quite young, rejoicing in a wealth of raven-black hair, came out of the kitchen.

"Oh, my father!" she cried, wringing her hands piteously.

"He has met with an accident. It is nothing serious," replied Ivan, coolly.

Taking a towel, he bound it round the arm, which was terribly shattered, and so stopped the effusion of blood.

"Now send for a doctor," he added. "I have no more time to spare."

Gunstock looked up and remarked—

"You have done what you could for me, and I should have done the same for you under the circumstances, but we are none the less enemies. I've got my eye on you and on Bill Silver."

At the mention of this name Ivan started visibly.

It seemed to make a great impression upon him.

"I do not know who you allude to," he replied.

"Oh, yes, you do. You were hunting with his hound to-day, and I have seen you together frequently."

"Silver—Bill Silver?" repeated the Russian, abstractedly, as if trying to remember some unknown or long-forgotten name.

"Yes, Bill Silver," answered Gunstock, "the biggest thief and poacher in the whole of Windsor; he keeps himself out of the way now, but he's up to his old tricks, I warrant. I've had him in gaol before now, and I'll have him again."

"Really, I am at a loss to understand you."

"You're very innocent, you are," said the keeper. "I——"

He paused abruptly.

An expression of acute suffering crossed his features, and he closed his eyes as if in a faint.

Ivan cast a contemptuous look at him, and without saying a word more quitted the apartment, leaving the keeper, who had really fainted, alone with his daughter and Jack.

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Sybil, "will you run into Old Windsor and bring a doctor? I am afraid my poor dear father will die."

"Not he," answered Jack. "He is worth a dozen dead men yet, my dear. But I am awfully sorry I can't show myself in the town. I am an Eton boy, and have had a little bother with one of the masters. It would not be good for my health if they caught me."

Sybil began to cry.

"What shall I do?" she said.

"I'll tell you," replied Jack. "You go for the doctor, little woman, and I'll mind the guv'nor."

"Will you really do that?"

"With all the pleasure in the world, and you can bet that I will prove as good a nurse as you would be. Run along. I'll keep house."

Sybil did not wait a moment.

Putting on her bonnet, she ran away, and in an hour's time she returned with a doctor, who examined his patient carefully.

"Humph," he exclaimed, "I shall have some trouble to extract the shot, but I think we shall have him on his legs again in a month or two at the outside. The bone is not injured, that's one good thing."

"Thank goodness," said Sybil.

"I must go now," observed Jack. "There is nothing more I can do for you, is there, little woman?"

Sybil smiled for the first time.

"I like the idea of you calling me little woman," she replied.

"So do I."

"You are only a boy."

"An Eton boy though, and that means

half a man. Wouldn't you like to have me for a sweetheart?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I should," Sybil replied, blushing.

"It is a pity I've got another girl," said Jack.

Sybil pouted her lips.

"Then why do you talk to me?" she inquired.

"Just for fun, little woman," Jack replied.

"Then I don't like you a little bit, though I thought I did at first."

"Come and see me to the door."

"What for?"

"I want to speak to you," Jack exclaimed.

The doctor was busily engaged in examining the keeper's arm for the shots which had lodged in the flesh, and Sybil slipped out after Jack.

"Now what is it?" she said as she stood in the porch. "Make haste, please. I can't leave poor papa long."

"Come nearer. I want to whisper."

"Whisper what?"

"Never you mind; come closer," Jack insisted.

Sybil came close to him.

He put his arm round her waist and imprinted a hearty kiss upon her lips.

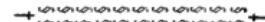
It was lucky for him that he retreated immediately, for she raised her hand and would have given him a box on the ear.

"Oh, you wretch! I'll pay you," she cried.

"Good-bye, little woman," he replied. "Ta-ta, tra-la-la; come and see you again soon."

Sybil, half crying with vexation, retired into the cottage, and Jack, whistling gaily, went on his way.

He had not gone more than a dozen yards before he saw standing perfectly still among the ferns a form he well knew.



CHAPTER XV.

IN THE GIPSIES' CAMP.

"Why, Effie, is it you?" he exclaimed. "I am glad."

The little gipsy girl did not smile or

extend her hand in token of friendship as she usually did.

"For why are you glad?" she asked.

"To meet you." Effie smiled scornfully.

"If you like me as you say," she replied, "why did you kiss that hateful girl who has just gone into the cottage?"

"Kiss her! Did I kiss her?" stammered Jack, in some confusion.

"I have eyes. I was standing here. I saw you."

"Well yes, now I come to think of it," replied Jack, "I think I did kiss her; but it was only for a lark. I did not mean anything. You are the only girl I ever loved, Effie, and I'm very sorry I spoke to Sybil at all."

"I hate Sybil. Come away; I want to talk to you," said the gipsy girl.

They walked together in the silent glades of the forest and took the direction of the camp of the gipsies.

"First of all, Jack of Eton," said Effie, "what are you here for?"

Jack explained to her all that happened, and told her how Ivan and Gunstock had quarrelled, that being the cause of his visiting the cottage, so that he never had seen Sybil before.

The little gipsy expressed herself satisfied.

"You can't like her and me too," she remarked; "but as you have told me the truth you may come to our tents and live with us."

Jack was delighted at the permission.

His spirits rose, and he thought it was quite charming to live a life under the greenwood tree and be the friend and companion of the gipsies.

What they lived on he did not know, but when they were cooking, a savoury smell always rose from the pots and kettles.

He was equally in the dark as to whether they had such luxuries as knives, forks, and plates, but sometimes it is fun to rough it.

In half-an-hour they reached the camp.

Effie left Jack to go into Ivan's tent and make an application for Jack to stay with them.

Presently Jack heard loud talking.

Effie quitted the tent first, followed by Ivan and Timor, whom Jack was very much surprised to see.

Timor looked very angry, and his face was red.

"Go away," he cried, addressing Effie,

"and remember that I am master here."

"You are a coward," replied Effie.

He took a few rapid paces towards her.

"What am I?" he asked, all the brutal violence in his Russian blood appearing in his tones and eyes.

"A coward," she answered calmly.

Ivan interposed.

"Be calm, both of you," he said.

"She has insulted me," replied Timor.

"You advised Ivan to refuse the request that I made to him to the effect that Jack of Eton might hide with us, and I told you I would have it so. You are not one of us."

"Yes I am to a certain extent."

"Well, well," exclaimed Ivan, trying to throw oil on the troubled waters, "Jack shall not stay."

"But I want him to," persisted Effie.

"Then you will have to want," said Timor; "go to your tent, and never interfere with me again."

"I am not afraid of you while Jack of Eton is here," replied Effie.

This speech enraged Timor still more, and, regardless of the consequences, he drew his favourite knout from his pocket.

With this he struck her a severe blow over the shoulders, and her frock being very thin, it broke the skin, drawing blood.

"Oh, you have hurt me!" she cried.

"I meant to," he answered with a complacent smile.

His self-satisfaction was short lived, for Jack, who had been an impatient spectator of the scene, rushed forward.

"Mind yourself, you big overgrown Russian bully," he exclaimed.

Timor turned, and tried to put himself on his guard.

It was too late, however, for Jack dealt him a blow which sent him spinning down the hill, finally sending him to grass in the valley below.

Effie clung tenderly to Jack's arm.

"You will not let him hurt me again," she exclaimed.

"Not if I know it, little girl," replied Jack.

"That is right. He is cruel enough for anything."

Hearing the noise, the gipsies came out of their tents.

Timor soon picked himself up, and

advancing up the hill, unbuttoned his jacket, displaying a handsome cross studded with diamonds.

It was evidently the badge of some secret order, and all those who saw it were obliged to obey the wearer.

He addressed the crowd in the Russian language, pointing to Jack.

Then he concluded in English—

"Seize him. Tie him to a tree. He shall taste of the knout for daring to strike a Russian nobleman."

To his intense surprise, Jack was instantly set upon by the gipsies, who tore him away from Effie, and bound his arms.

Ivan looked on, and made no opposition, as if perfectly willing to let his nephew, Timor, have his own way in such

a small matter as that of knouting anybody.

"Release me!" cried Jack, struggling.

The gipsies replied with loud laughter.

"Is this the boasted hospitality of the Gitanos?" continued Jack. "I came here for refuge, and you are treating me like a dog."

They bore him to a tree, and lashed him to it, so that he could not move.

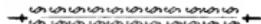
Timor now approached with his knout in his hand.

"I'll warm you, my boy," he cried.

"Will you?" asked Jack.

"Yes. I'll show you how we do it in Russia."

Raising the knout, it swished through the air, and descended with a dull thud on Jack's back.



CHAPTER XVI.

MR. AND MRS. BENJAMIN SODA HAVE A LITTLE PICNIC.

EFFIE reddened when she saw Timor attack her friend Jack.

The little gipsy was good-hearted, and she did not like to have him ill-treated.

"The cowardly Tartar;" she cried.

Then she rushed into a tent and possessed herself of a long sharp-bladed knife.

Advancing to Timor as the knout was falling for the third time on Jack's defenceless back, she exclaimed, loudly—

"Stand back!"

"Not for you," he replied.

"We shall see," Effie added, with a menacing gesture.

"Oh, you can't frighten me," Timor exclaimed; "I'm not an infant."

With one blow she cut the ropes which bound Jack, and he was free.

Timor was furious with rage, and actually foamed at the mouth with passion.

"Seize him again!" he exclaimed. "I will not be baulked in this way."

Effie waved the gipsies back.

"You shall not touch him," she said. "I swear by the Holy Cross that I will kill the first one who lays his hand on Jack of Eton."

The men knew her resolute temper, and were evidently intimidated, for they hesitated to advance.

"Seize him, I say!" roared Timor. There was no response.

"Ivanowitch," continued Timor, "am I to be thwarted like this?"

"I cannot interfere," replied Ivan.

"You are my uncle. This boy has insulted our family in my person, and you are as much interested in having him punished as myself."

"Effie must have her way."

"Our honour should be vindicated, uncle."

"Another time. The girl has taken him under her protection. Let him go," said Ivan carelessly.

Timor ground his teeth savagely together and stamped his foot upon the ground.

"By heaven, I will be terribly revenged for this," he exclaimed.

Effie took Jack by the hand and led him down the hill.

"Run," she said; "if they catch you again I may not be able to save you. Keep away from Timor."

"You can go 'nap' on that," replied Jack.

"What!"

"I mean I'll take your advice, little woman, and give him a wide berth, though I did want to stay with your tribe."

"Not now. Get out of the forest," she urged.

Jack was puzzled at this request.

"So you said before," he remarked.
"But why should I?"

"You are in danger."

"Explain how, and in what way?" he queried.

"I cannot. I must not say anything more. You do not know the secrets of this place as well as I do. I have heard them talk of you, and—"

She paused abruptly.

"Well, go on," said Jack.

"It is impossible. Leave at once, I implore you; your life even may be in danger."

"Rubbish," exclaimed Jack. "I'm not so easily frightened, though I'm much obliged to you, my dear, for your friendly advice, which I assure you is taken in the spirit in which it is given. Good-bye."

"You will go home, won't you?"

"I can't promise that. Perhaps I shall go to the keeper's cottage."

"Where Sybil is?" asked Effie, a shade of jealousy crossing her face.

"Yes, but you wouldn't like that. I'll think of something else. Ta-ta."

They shook hands, and he was walking off, when Timor shouted after him.

"Dashley," he said, "you have run away. I have got leave for the day, but when I go back I'll tell my tutor where you are, and if I can't thrash you, the head master shall."

"Sneak!" replied Jack.

"What if I am? It will be a pleasure to get you whipped. Ha, ha! That is where my revenge will come in."

"Oh, go to Putney," Jack answered.

He quitted the spot, feeling the contempt which he had always had for Timor increase tenfold.

It was a lovely day, and his spirits rose as he wandered along between the stately trees, though there was nothing in his circumstances to make him feel gay.

If he went back to college he was sure to get punished, and if he remained away he did not know where to hide himself, unless he went to Gunstock's cottage.

He was in an embarrassing situation.

All at once he came upon a sequestered glade, in the midst of which was a large

pond, the surface of which was dotted with water lilies.

It was just the spot that a lover of nature would select for a picnic.

"I think I'll rest here and put on my thinking-cap," said Jack to himself.

He sat down at the foot of a moss-covered tree.

Scarcely had he ensconced himself in the snug position than he heard voices coming in his direction.

"Come on, Benjamin," exclaimed the voice of a woman.

"I am coming as quick as I can," replied a man, "only this confounded basket's heavy, I can tell you."

"What poor creatures you men are. You're always grumbling. I declare I hate to come out with you anywhere."

"How would you like to lug this basket about?"

"It's not a woman's place, Mr. Soda."

"I wish it was, Mrs. Soda."

By this time Jack had discovered that the persons approaching were Mr. and Mrs. Soda, who had evidently resolved to have a day's outing "under the greenwood tree."

It was their intention to picnic in the forest.

For this purpose they had packed a basket full of good things, and this, with much toil and trouble, Mr. Soda had carried all the way from Datchet.

"I can't go any further," said Soda. "Seems to me that my arms are being dragged out of their sockets."

"You poor miserable worm," replied his better half.

"What am I?"

"A worm; nothing more or less."

"I wish I was dead," said the wretched man. "Your constant nagging is enough to drive a man silly."

Mrs. Soda pointed to the pond.

"Drown yourself," she replied. "You'll be no loss."

Jack was very much amused at this colloquy, and kept himself hidden, so as not to appear until the repast was spread out.

"Have another drop of gin, my dear," answered Soda. "It'll make your sweet temper a trifle sweeter."

"You wretch. I'll beat you more for that than anything" she cried.

"Gently over the stones, my pet."

What are the words of the poet—"Let not your angry passions rise and—'"

"Be quiet with your rubbishing quotations," she interrupted.

Breaking off a switch from a tree she advanced towards him, and began to beat him.

"Leave off 'Ria," he exclaimed. "I'll commit suicide in that pond if you don't."

"You're too much of a coward."

"I will do it—for what are the words of the poet—'We may meet in the sweet by-and-bye.' Oh, oh! Lay it on lightly, 'Ria."

She grew tired of thrashing him, and pointed to the water.

"Do it," she said.

"I will," he answered. "There must be an end to this life of misery. You have made existence an insupportable burden to me."

"That's what you say."

"It is true. The time has come when I will shuffle off this mortal coil, for what are the words of the poet?"

"Bother the poet. Don't threaten me with suicide. Let me see you do it."

"You shall," replied Mr. Soda with a tragic air.

"None of your nonsense now."

He took a run towards the pond, but stopped short on the brink.

"Old Brandy and Soda has got the pluck to do it," thought Jack.

"Ha, ha!" laughed his wife, "I said you were a coward. You were humbugging me. I'll beat you more for that than anything."

"My dear," replied Mr. Soda, "it is true that I lack the moral courage to carry my plan into operation, but—"

He paused.

"What?" she asked.

"I will stand here on the edge and you shall come behind and push me in. Never shall you wish me dead and tell me so again."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Soda. "Stand still; I'll push you, and when you're drowned, I will go home and marry the baker."

"Ha!" cried her husband, "it is as I thought."

"Didn't you know he admired me?"

"No matter; you shall marry the baker. Adieu to life. What are the

words of the poet—"Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness!"

Mrs. Soda had evidently been drinking heavily, and it seemed to Jack as if she did not quite know what she was doing.

If she had been in her proper senses it is not likely that she would want to drown her husband, unless she was a worse woman than he took her to be.

"Now then, look out," she exclaimed.

"Ready," he replied. "Take a good run. Good-bye, 'Ria."

"Good-bye," she answered.

Jack saw Mr. Soda look over his shoulder, and fancied he detected a merry twinkle in his eyes.

The wife began to run with her arms outstretched, and her pace increased at every step she took.

When she reached her husband she made an energetic push at his back; but she had reckoned without her host.

He stepped nimbly on one side.

She found nothing to impede her progress, and being unable to stop herself, plunged head first into the pond.

Splash!

It was quite eight or ten feet deep in that particular spot, and she floundered about, screaming wildly, until she got hold of a board which held her up.

The board was luckily floating on the surface, or she would have sunk like a stone.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Soda. "Water nice and cool, my dear?"

"Oh, you horrid old beast!" she replied.

"He, he, he!"

"You did it on purpose, and I'll beat you more for that than anything else."

"I rather think I did, my love. You didn't think I was quite such a flat an simpleton as to let you shove me into the water, swimming not being one of my accomplishments."

"Help me out, you wretch."

"Not much. I shall look on and see you drown."

"Vile creature!"

"It is only tit for tat, my sweet."

"You call yourself a man," exclaimed Mrs. Soda, "and can stand there and gloat over my dying agonies."

"Gloat is precisely the word, my dear."

"Brute that you are, let me only get

at you. I'll beat you more for that than anything."

"But you will not get out, my angel," replied Mr. Soda. "I have a firm conviction that you will soon sink. What are the words of the poet—'She who is born to be drowned will never be hanged.'"

"You deserve to be hanged. Oh, Benjamin," she added changing her tone, "save me; I have been a good wife to you."

At this declaration Mr. Soda went into convulsions of laughter, which threatened to choke him.

"Ho, ho, ho! ha, ha, ha! he, he, he!" he roared, placing his hands on his knees.

"Save me, save me!"

"It is out of my power, my love, for as I previously remarked, I am unable to swim. It is one of the branches of my education which was neglected in my youthful days."

"I'll never beat you again."

"That is precisely my opinion, for you will never have the chance, my love. For once, you see, we agree."

Mr. Soda assumed quite a gay and festive air.

"I—I won't marry the baker," she continued.

"That is lucky for the baker my precious one."

"Oh, Benjamin, I'll turn over a new leaf, indeed I will."

As she said this her hand slipped from the board, and she plumped right over, disappearing under the water.

"Humph!" said Mr. Soda, "what are the words of the poet—'Though lost to sight to memory dear.'"

When she came up again she spluttered and coughed and choked, blowing like an exhausted grampus, or a bottle-nosed whale in a fit.

"Ha! she appears again in the arena," remarked Mr. Soda. "Always was a very energetic and persevering woman."

She again clutched the board and kept her head above water.

"Benjamin," she gasped, "would you have my death on your mind? This is nothing more or less than murder."

"No, my dear, oh dear no; it is suicide. I did not push you into the water. You jumped in of your own accord. It would have been murder if you had worked your wicked will on me," he replied.

"Get a stick and hold out one end to me, Benny, darling."

"Eh? Say that again."

"Benny, darling," she repeated.

"Why, bless me, you haven't spoken to me like that for twenty years 'Ria. What are the words of the poet—'Twas ever thus in childhood's hour.' I never loved a bird or flower but it was sure to fall into the water and get drowned."

"I'm sinking; I've got cramps, Ben!" cried Mrs. Soda. "Get me out quick, or it will be all up with me."

"Farewell, my love. I'll cut off a lock of your hair when the body is recovered."

Mrs. Soda's face assumed a ghastly hue; she turned up her eyes like a dying duck in a thunderstorm, and really appeared as if she was going to sink.

Her husband thought the joke had gone far enough.

He did not really intend her to be drowned, but only wanted to punish her for her bad temper, and teach her a lesson which might induce her to behave better to him.

Looking around he picked up a long stick, and held it out to her.

She grasped it with the energy of despair, and was gradually pulled to land.

Jack saw her begin to climb up the bank, and feeling that she was safe, he determined to make hay while the sun shone.

He rushed towards the hamper which contained the good things intended for the picnic, and, without being perceived, carried it some distance.

A secluded spot being reached, he set it down and opened it.

Quite a tempting display of delicacies was revealed.

Cold fowl and ham, lamb and mint sauce, half a sucking-pig, tarts and cakes, with other good things, greeted his ravished gaze.

"I'm in luck," he said. "Hurrah! I shan't starve in the forest, if I have run away from school, and the gipsies won't have me. Bravo! my luck's dead in, when I thought it was clean gone."

He spread out the feast, wishing that his chum Owen was with him to enjoy it, and found at the bottom of the basket two bottles of champagne, one of whisky, and some beer.

Losing no time he fell to, and began to eat ravenously.

After a time he felt thirsty, and taking up a bottle of "sparkling" he popped the cork.

Pop!

The sound found an echo amid the trees, and to his consternation he heard a voice.

"Here's the thief. Come on Benny," exclaimed Mrs. Soda; "I've found him."

"Where, my dear?"

"Right here."

Jack groaned inwardly, for he knew he was in for it.

Mrs. Soda, followed by her husband, now appeared upon the scene, and shaking a stick which she used to walk with, glared at him.

She was somewhat damp, and the water dripped from her.

Occasionally she shivered.

Her hair had escaped from the net in which she wore it, and draggled over her shoulders.

Added to this, that her face was distorted with rage, it may be readily imagined that she was not a very fascinating spectacle.

"Oh, you little vampire!" she cried.

"That's me, ma'am," replied Jack.

"You're nothing better than a robber."

"So am I."

"I'll give you something."

"Thank you; it isn't necessary," said Jack calmly. "I'm helping myself, as you see. Capital pig, fine fowl, rattling good wine. Your health mum."

She was paralysed at his audacity.

"The cheek of him, Ben," she said. "Oh, I'll beat him more for that than anything."

Mr. Soda extended his hand.

"Stay, my love," he replied. "I know this young gentleman; he is one of my private pupils—Dashley, or I'm mistaken."

"That's right enough, exclaimed Jack. "Sit down and join me. Here's enough for all."

"Well I never," said Mrs. Soda.

"Did you ever?" observed Mr. Soda. "Can't I beat him?" asked she.

"No, my dear. Not this time. He is

a pupil, and I cannot afford to offend him. Let him off this time. You promised to be good."

Mrs. Soda tried to master her rage, but she could not do it.

"No matter what I promised. I'll take it out of him," she cried.

"Hush, my dear. What are the words of the poet—'A soft answer turneth away wrath.'"

He attempted to grasp her arm, but she shook him off and ran towards Jack.

"I'll let him have it," she said.

Jack thought it only prudent to clear out, and he accordingly got up and made tracks as quickly as he could.

But he did not go empty handed.

In one hand he had half a fowl, and in the other a bottle of champagne, which he thought would revive his drooping spirits.

He being fleet of foot, it was useless for Mrs. Soda to attempt to follow him, and she directed her ill-temper upon her unfortunate husband, whom she soundly belaboured with a stick.

"Oh, you mean thing!" she exclaimed. "Why don't you stop him? I'll beat you more for that than anything."

Whack, whack! Thump, thump!

"Easy does it, my dear," replied Mr. Soda. "What are the words of the poet—'If I had a donkey and he wouldn't go, do you think I'd wallop him? oh dear, no!'"

Jack did not wait to hear any more.

He ran for half-a-mile, and then finished his repast, drinking as much as he wanted of the champagne, and then prepared to throw the bottle away.

Looking up he found he was in front of Herne's oak.

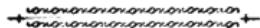
"Halloa!" he said; "when I cut away from Mrs. Brandy and Soda I didn't know that I was going in this direction I'll have a shy at the oak."

He flung the bottle at the tree.

It struck it with a dull hollow sound, and broke into a dozen or more pieces.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed a wild unearthly voice.

Jack trembled from head to foot.



CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE CAVE.

IT was difficult for Jack Dashley to account for the nervous trepidation with which he was seized on hearing this strange mocking sepulchral laughter, unless it was totally different from anything that he had ever heard before.

That there was something mysterious about the tree he did not doubt.

He had not forgotten how strangely Timor had disappeared in its hidden recesses.

Inflamed with the wine he had drunk, he went close to the tree and peered into its naked branches.

"Who is there?" he demanded.

Again the weird laughter echoed through the woodland, seeming to come from all parts at once.

He gazed round him in confusion.

Whether it was his fancy or not, he could not tell, but he imagined he saw a dim and shadowy form flitting about among the trees.

This form strangely resembled Timor.

Bewildered and angry, he once more concentrated his gaze upon the tree, and saw the fantastic form of Herne the Hunter.

There was the wild unkempt head of long straggling hair, surmounted by the horns; the eyes glowed like live coals;

the body was encased in a tight-fitting black garb, and one arm was extended, as if beckoning him.

Unable to restrain his impatient curiosity, Jack ran to the tree and climbed into the branches, as Timor had done on a former occasion.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the demon hunter.

Jack had rushed upon his fate.

The form of Herne sank slowly into the hollow body of the tree, but ere it entirely disappeared from view, the long arms encircled Jack's neck.

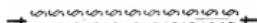
A terrible grip nearly choked him; his breath came at intervals in long spasmodic gasps, and as his tongue protruded from his mouth and his eyes started from their sockets, he thought his last hour had come.

He gave himself up for lost.

The repeated warning of little Effie came to his mind, and he wished he had not been so rash as to put himself in the power of Herne.

Down he went, seemingly into the bowels of the earth.

Whither he was going he had no idea, nor was he long able to speculate on the question, as the deathlike grip tightened on his throat, and he became unconscious.



CHAPTER XVIII.

JACK'S CHUM GETS INTO TROUBLE.

JACK DASHLEY'S disappearance from his usual place in school was quickly discovered, and on inquiries being made, he was nowhere to be found.

His tutor made a search for him, but he had not been seen since breakfast, and the only conclusion that the authorities could come to was that he had run away to avoid punishment.

The head master was communicated with, and he felt very much annoyed, as it rarely happened that a boy ran away.

When such a thing did occur it was

regretted by the masters, because it set a bad example to the other boys.

Great excitement prevailed.

Mr. Dryasdust related all that had occurred to the head master, who shook his head.

"I am afraid you were a little hasty," he exclaimed.

"Why so?" replied Mr. Dryasdust. "He is a curious boy; and I shall never be persuaded that he did not destroy my book, which, as you know, was the labour of half a lifetime."

"Yes, yes. I am aware of all that, and I sympathise as deeply with you in your misfortune as is possible, yet I can see that the circumstance has created a prejudice in your mind against the boy."

"I hope not."

"Indeed it is so, without you being aware of it," replied the head master.

"I fancied that I was more strong-minded than that, yet I will admit that I had made up my mind to have Dashley whipped the first time I caught him tripping."

The head master smiled.

"There it is. You have confessed to the 'animus,' and I am sorry you did not consult me before threatening him."

"But surely, sir," said Mr. Dryasdust, "you do not defend his conduct in going into my private garden, entering my pheasantry, and taking the eggs for his own breakfast?"

"No, I do not; yet the offence is not so bad as lying or incorrigible idleness. It might, in the case of a high-spirited boy, have been looked over altogether."

"Perhaps you are right, though it is too late to retrace our steps. The boy must be found and brought back."

"Yes, replied the head master; "and when we get him, I shall have no alternative but to flog him as an example. This kind of thing is catching, and we shall have many more boys running away if we are too lenient. Have you telegraphed to his friends?"

"Yes, and his father says he has not come home."

"Strange," mused the doctor.

"I think he is hiding somewhere in the neighbourhood," hazarded Mr. Dryasdust.

"Possibly. Has he any friends?"

"One very particular chum, Owen Tudor."

"Humph! Did you question him?"

"I have not done so yet," answered Mr. Dryasdust.

"Pray do so at once. It was an omission on your part. Dashley is not likely to have run away from Eton without telling his chum where he went to."

This view of the case struck Mr. Dryasdust as being very reasonable, and he wondered he had not thought of it before."

"I will do so. But suppose" said he, "that Tudor will not speak?"

The conversation was taking place in the doctor's room in the upper school, and on a table was lying a birch, with which some unfortunate had been whipped that morning, for Eton is a great school for corporal punishment, and scarcely a day passes without one or two birchings taking place.

"That will induce him to talk," answered the doctor.

It was now Mr. Dryasdust's turn to smile.

"Are you not contradicting your own theory?" he said, "in speaking of punishing a boy harshly? Suppose Tudor runs away?"

"Ah, well," replied the doctor, "this is a different case. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. Go and interview Tudor, and if he will not give you any information about Dashley, send him to me after three o'clock school. The birch is a great persuader."

Mr. Dryasdust went away to act on the advice or rather the instructions of the head master.

It may seem that the latter was somewhat harsh, and did not think any more of punishing Owen than Owen would have thought of killing a fly.

But it must be remembered that cruel punishments are delivered at all our public schools, and that it has been the custom for centuries.

When an Eton boy himself, the doctor had submitted to the discipline, and since he had succeeded to the high position he held, he had on innumerable occasions used the birch, thinking nothing of it.

It was only when Jack had run away to avoid it that he began to imagine that there was something wrong in the system.

It is to be hoped that with the spread of civilization the barbarous practice of whipping boys will be done away with.

All right-minded people must hold that it is a relic of feudalism, transmitted to us from the middle ages.

Mr. Dryasdust walked straight to Owen Tudor's room, where he found him engaged in writing a copy of Latin verses.

Directly he saw his tutor Owen guessed the nature of his business.

"Take a seat, sir," he said, politely offering him a chair.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Dryasdust, sitting down. "It is a bad business about Dashley absenting himself from school."

"He has run away," exclaimed Owen, "and I am very sorry that he will not come back."

"Yes. You were a great friend of his, I believe, for I used to see you always together, like the Siamese twins."

"We were great chums, sir," said Owen, "and I am proud of it. Jack is a good-hearted boy, and I don't believe there is a better in the school."

"Humph! We differ there."

"How I do miss him," continued Owen. "If it hadn't been for Timor, I don't think he would have run away."

"What in the world had Timor to do with it?"

"He is Jack's enemy. They cordially detest one another. Timor has an uncle a gipsy, and Jack found it out."

"Nonsense. Timor belongs to a highly respectable and influential Russian family. Dashley should not have spread such injurious reports."

"They are true, for I have seen the gipsies, who are now in Windsor Park, and Timor has done all he can to injure Jack ever since," answered Owen. "In fact, he has succeeded in setting you against him."

"Oh no! I was a little annoyed when my book was burnt, and I thought Dashley did it for——"

Owen indignantly interrupted him.

"Let me say a word for the absent, sir," he exclaimed. "I'll swear Jack did not do it."

"That is very positive language. If Dashley was not the guilty party, who was?"

"Timor himself. It was a deep-laid plot of the Russian."

"Can you prove that?"

"Unfortunately I cannot," said Owen, "but it is true nevertheless, and I'd stick to it if I was going to die the next minute."

"My dear boy," exclaimed Mr. Dryasdust, patting his head kindly, "you are young and somewhat hasty. Take my advice and never bring random accusations against anybody. I excuse you on account of your friendship for Dashley.

By the way, did he tell you where he was going?"

Artfully as the tutor led up to this question, and abruptly as he put it, Owen was not thrown off his guard.

"What, sir?" he asked, in some confusion.

"Did Dashley tell you where he intended to hide?"

Owen made no answer, but held down his head.

"Come," continued Mr. Dryasdust, "you will do Dashley no good by being reticent, because his running away will ruin his scholastic career. If boys leave our school they are never liked at another, and in after life it will be cast at him."

"I know that. I wish he had not gone."

"But where is he?"

"He did not go home, sir," said Owen.

"I am not asking you where he did not go, but where he is at the present moment?" exclaimed Mr. Dryasdust petulantly.

"I cannot tell you," answered Owen resolutely.

He made up his mind in an instant that he would rather suffer anything and everything than betray his friend.

"Then you know?" continued Mr. Dryasdust. "Do not tell me any stories."

"Yes, I do know," Owen replied, "but I must not let any one know. I promised him I would not."

"Foolish boy," exclaimed his tutor; "you are only making it disagreeable for yourself. If you do not tell me where he is I shall send you to the head master after three o'clock school, and you know what the consequences will be."

"Can't help it, sir," Owen said doggedly.

"You absolutely refuse to speak?"

"I do."

"Your obstinacy will do Dashley no good and yourself harm. However, the consequences be on your head."

With these threatening words his tutor left Owen to his own reflections, which were certainly not of the most pleasant nature.

It really seemed very hard to Owen that he should be punished because he would not betray his friend.

At first he thought he would run away and join Jack in the forest, but a moment's

reflection decided him not to do that as it would pain his mother, who took a great interest in his scholastic career, and wanted him to go with all honours from Eton to a university.

While he was in the dumps Bill Bragg entered the room.

"Come out and have a game at fives," he exclaimed. "You're always sweating away at some beastly theme or sapping at verses."

"I've got the blues," replied Owen.

"All the more reason why you should wake up. Look at me. I was never sick or sorry in my life except once."

"When was that?"

"One day I was out riding, fell, broke both arms, both my legs and my collarbone."

"Indeed!"

"Fact; but that's nothing. I'm right enough, slap-bang, and all alive."

He took a handful of chesnuts from his pocket, and threw some to Owen.

"Have some," he continued. "I'm going to roast mine. Do you know the beauty of roasted chesnuts?"

Owen admitted that he did not.

"Warm your hands and fill your stomach for a penny. I'm a first-rate cook," he went on, as he put a few on the bars of the grate. "Once I was cooking eels; it was winter, and they were frozen, so I put them in some luke-warm water to thaw them out. I put them afterwards in the frying-pan, and presently they jumped out and slid under the bed, making a noise like the barking of a dog."

This was too much for Owen's gravity, and he began to laugh.

"What awful lies you tell," he said.

"Never told a lie in my life," replied Bragg. "I'd scorn the idea. *Houplà!*" he added as a chesnut went pop. "Slap-bang, and all alive."

Owen proceeded to tell him about Mr. Dryasdust, and how he had to see the head master after school because he would not betray his friend.

"Deuced hard lines," said Bragg. "That's what I call a beastly shame."

"So it is, but I won't split."

"Quite right too," exclaimed Bragg. "I've been switched, and it doesn't hurt after it is all over. You dance about like a bear on hot plates for a minute, and

then you forget all about it. But where is Dashley?"

"I can't even tell you."

"Oh, all right, I don't want to know—only asked out of curiosity. I think he was a fool to run away though. When I was at a private school I hooked it once, walked ten miles, slept under a hayrick, was attacked by rats in the night, killed two hundred of them with a stick."

"What, two hundred!"

"Fact, I assure you."

"Weren't you hurt?"

"Didn't get a scratch. Come out slap-bang, and all alive!"

At this moment Timor put his head in at the door.

"I've seen your friend Dashley," he exclaimed, "and I mean to give him up."

Owen turned pale.

"Where did you see him?" he inquired.

"With the gipsies. I got him kicked out of their camp, though he is wandering about the forest somewhere. My tutor will soon find out."

There was a look of triumphant malice about Timor's face which was peculiarly irritating to Owen.

"I wouldn't be a sneak," he exclaimed. "Jack has never done you any harm unless you have provoked it."

"That's what you say. Wait till he's brought back. Won't he look foolish," returned Timor.

He disappeared as rapidly as he had come in, and Owen was left with Bragg, who shared Owen's disgust at Timor's vindictiveness.

"I hate that fellow more than anyone in the school," said Owen.

"He's an artful one," answered Bragg. "I wouldn't like to offend him; he'd get square with you if he had to wait a twelvemonth."

"I couldn't do that. If I have a row with a chap, I've got to have it out at once."

"Same here," said Bragg. "I recollect throwing a fellow down a well, but as soon as he disappeared I forgave him, and began to wind up the bucket and pull him out again."

"Wasn't he injured?" Owen inquired.

"Got a ducking, that's all; he seemed rather wild, and I noticed that he didn't care much about wells after that."

"I should think not."

"It was kind and generous of me though to let him come out. Slap-bang and all alive though, but I'm a good-hearted chap. I've got it there, my boy."

He laid his hand on his waistcoat in the region which is popularly supposed to contain the heart.

"You make me laugh," said Owen.

"Isn't it better to laugh than cry?" answered Bill Bragg. "You'll cry enough when you have that interview with the head master. He does lay it on. I was 'up' once, the same time as the Duke of St. Ambrose was. St. Ambrose had shied a Bible at another fellow one Sunday evening, and got bowled out because the good book hit his tutor in the eye as he was coming along the passage. The duke had six cuts, and then he turned to the doctor and said—'You brute, I'd like to punch your head.' He got it hot for that."

"I should like Eton very much if it wasn't for the flogging," remarked Owen.

"That's just what the young man said of the army after he'd been fool enough to enlist in a marching regiment; but I say—"

"What?"

"Timor is going to tell where Dashley is. Why don't you go down to my tutor and get ahead of him?"

"It isn't a bad idea," replied Owen.

"Do it, my boy; be quick about it. Imitate my way of doing things. Slap-bang and all alive."

Owen thought that he could not do his friend any harm now and might save himself from a punishment which he looked upon as degrading.

He left Bragg eating the chesnuts and ran down to the pupil-room, where he knew Mr. Dryasdust was engaged in looking over some exercises before dinner.

At the entrance to the room he met Timor coming out.

The Russian stuck his tongue in his cheek and put his finger derisively to his nose, while he took advantage of the opportunity to give Owen a kick on the shin.

"You spiteful beast," said Owen.

"Call me a beast and I'll kick you," answered Timor.

"So you are. What did you cool-shin me for?"

"Because I choose to. Don't you like it?"

"No, I don't."

"No, I don't," repeated Timor mockingly as he imitated his voice and manner. "Then you can do the other thing. Ba-a-a, you Welsh goat, go along."

Owen was burning with rage and resentment, but he could not fight Timor, and did not like to say anything.

"Oh, if I was only big enough I'd give you something."

Timor passed on, and stifling his anger Owen went into the pupil-room.

"Can I speak to you, sir?" he exclaimed to his tutor.

Mr. Dryasdust looked up.

"Oh, it's you Tudor; what do you want?" he asked.

"If you wish to know about Dashley I can tell you where he is."

"Too late. Timor has been here, and I am thankful to say has given me the information that I required. Fine fellow, Timor. Frank, open-hearted, generous. He is an honour to the school, for he has the welfare of the school at heart."

"If you know where Dashley is," said Owen, "of course you will not have me punished."

"I certainly shall."

"Please, sir—"

"Don't talk to me," interrupted Mr. Dryasdust. "You will suffer first and Dashley will receive his deserts when he is brought back. Emissaries have already gone after him and we expect to have him in our power shortly."

Feeling sick at heart and miserable, Owen slowly quitted the pupil-room, wishing now that he had not lowered himself by offering to tell.

When he returned to his room he told Bragg of his ill-success.

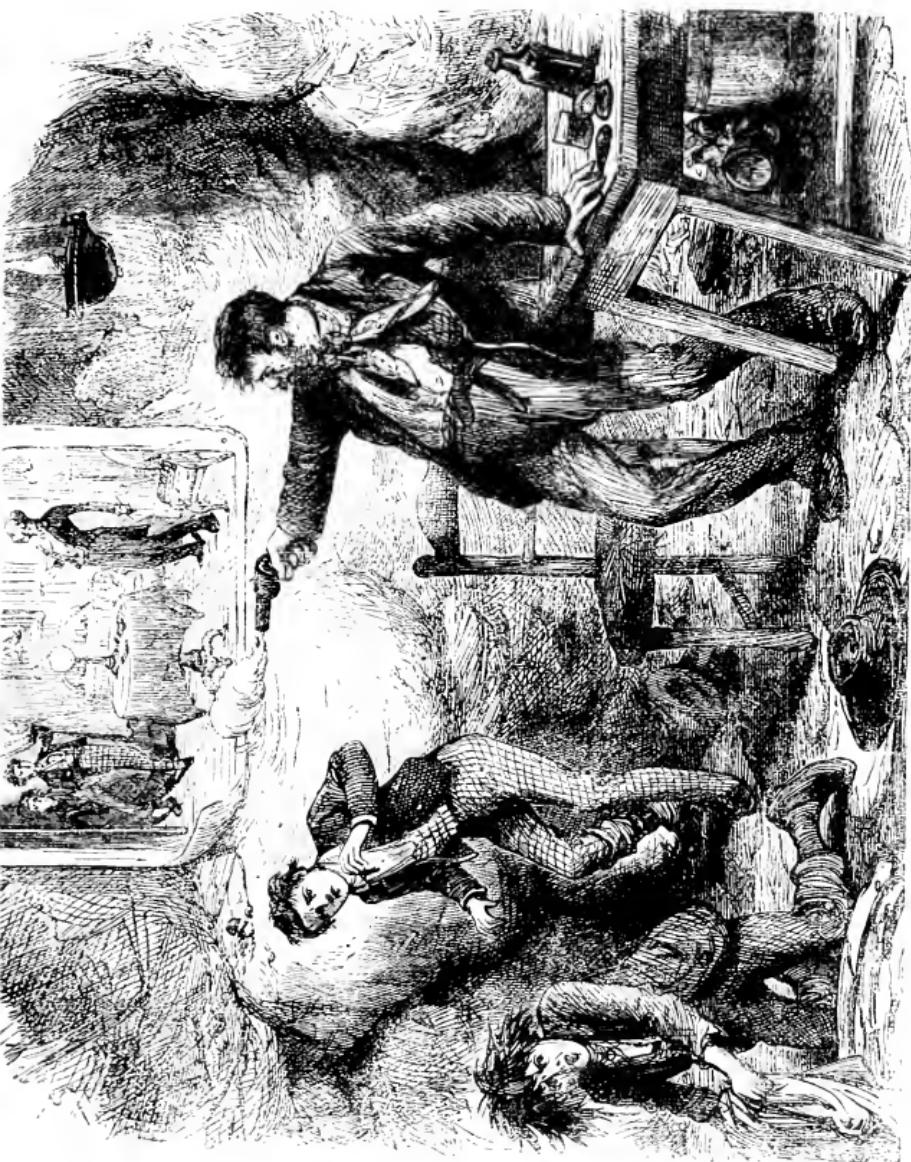
"Never mind, old boy, cheer up; have a chesnut."

"Oh, hang the chesnuts."

"By all means if it will do you any good. Care killed the cat. Be like me, Slap-bang and all alive," replied Bragg, who began to whistle "The Wearing of the Green."

"I've a jolly good mind to bolt and join Jack," remarked Owen.

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"HEE GOES FOR ANOTHER SHOT," CRIED BILL SILVER."

"Don't you do it, my boy. Take my tip—there are worse places than Eton, that's a moral."

The bell rang for dinner, and Owen went down with the rest, though he had little appetite and made a poor meal.

At three o'clock he took his books to the schoolyard and waited until the long gowns of the masters were seen as they went to the different schoolrooms.

"All up! all up!" cried the boys, which is the usual exclamation when it is time to go into school.

Owen followed the rest of his division into the upper school, and the usual routine proceeded.

It was Roman history; he had not looked at the lesson.

As is the usual luck in such a case, he was called up.

"Tudor," said the master.

And he started to his feet.

"Who was Regulus?" asked the master.

"A distinguished Roman, sir," replied Owen.

"What was the act that brought him into celebrity?"

Owen looked at the ceiling, then at the ground, and at last was obliged to say he did not know.

"You will write out the whole chapter and bring it to me to-morrow morning," said the master, adding "Damon."

Another boy got up. He was a smart, sprightly boy who worked hard, and as a rule knew everything.

"Regulus, sir," he exclaimed glibly, "went as a hostage to Carthage, and had his eyelids cut off by the Carthaginians."

So the lesson went on, Owen feeling more miserable every moment, and looking anxiously towards the door.

Presently a tall boy, who was the sixth form *præpostor* or "marker-in," entered the upper school.

"Is Tudor in this division?" he asked, looking at a slip of paper he held in his hand.

"Yes," replied Owen.

"Come to the head master after school."

This was the knell of doom, for it meant punishment, and all the boys looked at him and grinned.

After school he proceeded to the head master's room and entered.

Two collegers with gowns on stood by the block on which he had to kneel, the *præpostor* was arranging some birches on the table, and the doctor looked sternly at Owen.

"You are 'in the bill,'" said the doctor, "for disobedience."

"Yes, sir," replied Owen, shivering a little.

"Why did you not give your tutor the desired information?"

"Because I did not think it right to betray my friend, sir."

"But you could not think it right of your friend to defy the discipline of the school and run away. What have you to say to that?"

"Dashley, sir, is different from me. I conform to discipline, or I should not have been here now. I too could have run away. He thought Mr. Dryasdust had a spite against him. If I am to suffer for not giving him up I can't help it, though I think it is rather unfair."

"So you acted from a sentiment of honour?"

"Exactly, sir."

The head master had taken up a birch, but he put it down again as if he had altered his mind.

"Well," he said, "you can go. I shall not flog you this time though I must impress upon your mind that you have acted from a mistaken sentiment of honour, and when you come to reflect upon it I think you will agree with me. Go, Tudor, and in future do not regard your masters as tyrants; we are put in authority over you and act only for your good."

Owen could scarcely believe his good luck.

"Can I really go, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly, run along," replied the doctor kindly.

Away he went, only too glad to get away from the dismal-looking torture-chamber which had echoed the groans of many generations of boys.

"Hurrah!" he cried, throwing his hat in the air.

At the bottom of the stairs was Bill Bragg, who was waiting to greet him when all was over.

"I say, cheese it," he exclaimed; "that hat hit me in the eye."

"Did it? I'm awfully sorry."

"How did you get along?" continued

Bragg, picking up the offending hat and giving it him. "Did it sting?"

"The doctor let me off. He's a brick. Come up town. I'll stand you all the cakes, tarts, and buns you can eat," replied Owen.

"Let off, eh!" cried Bragg, with wide open eyes.

"Yes."

"Well I'm blowed!" said Bragg, who seemed rather disappointed than otherwise at this unexpected clemency on the part of the doctor.

Owen put his arm in his, saying—
"Buckle to."

And they went up town together.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONDEMNED.

WHEN Jack Dashley recovered his senses he found himself lying on his back with something heavy fastened round his right leg.

Stretching out his hand, he discovered that this ponderous substance was a thick chain composed of heavy iron links.

Sitting up he looked around him.

An oil-lamp hung from the ceiling or roof, showing that he was in a sandstone cave of large dimensions and irregular formation, the sides being rugged and jagged.

Reposing on two chairs in front of a common deal table, on which stood a bottle and some glasses, were a couple of men.

One he had no difficulty in recognising as the Russian, Ivanowitch, chief of the gypsies, but the other was unknown to him.

He was a tall, stout, thickly-built personage, hairy and savage in his appearance, and gifted with a fierce scowl, and his general hang-dog looks were aggravated by his thick beetling eyebrows.

On the floor were a variety of articles, among which a cursory glance enabled him to see a stag's horns resembling those which the person supposed to be Herne the Hunter wore on his head, and piled in a heap were the pieces of plate stolen from Mr. Dryasdust's, and a variety of things, evidently the plunder of many houses in the vicinity of Windsor and Eton.

The sandstone cave clearly was connected with Herne's oak, a shaft communicating with the hollow trunk of the tree, and giving access to the vaulted chamber below.

That it was a den of robbers he did not doubt.

He conjectured that the companion of Ivan was the well-known thief of whom Gunstock had spoken, named Bill Silver.

What he subsequently learned justified this assumption.

Bill Silver was a confederate of Ivan.

They committed robberies together, conveying their plunder to the cave.

At times Bill would put on the horns, dress himself in black, and appearing on the branches of the oak or in the forest, terrify people as the apparition of Herne the Hunter.

The mystery of the cave, which had for so long perplexed him, was now explained.

Jack found that the other end of the chain was fastened to a staple firmly imbedded in the sandstone.

He was then a prisoner, but what his ultimate fate was to be he could not imagine.

While noticing all these things, he heard a voice which seemed to come from the roof.

"Father!" cried the voice, which was shrill and elfish, "he's woke up."

Casting his eyes in the direction from whence the sound came, he saw a boy, whose age might have been thirteen, perched upon a projecting ledge of rock near the roof.

He was very thin, and had unusually long legs and arms.

His head was old-fashioned in appearance, like that of an old man of fifty, and his bony fingers were skeletal and double-jointed.

His hair hung in elfish locks over his forehead.

There was a certain resemblance about him to a sprite in a pantomime.

The ledge he was sitting on was very narrow, and it was a wonder how he managed to keep his balance.

This was the son of Bill Silver, who from the rapidity of his movements, and his love of climbing had acquired the nickname of Quicksilver.

The boy could climb like a squirrel or a monkey, and was never happy when sitting on a chair like a reasonable being.

When Quicksilver called his father's attention to Jack, the two men turned their faces towards the prisoner.

"Oh, you've come to, have you?" said Bill.

"Yes," replied Jack boldly; "and I demand to know by what right I am dragged here and chained up like a dog."

"You have offended Timor," replied Bill.

"Who are you?"

"Bill Silver, a pal of Ivan's, and as good a cracksman as there is in the country. I'm Herne the Hunter sometimes," he added, with a laugh.

"Then it was you who caught hold of me in the tree and nearly choked the life out of me," Jack continued.

"That's me, and that youth up there is my lad, Quicksilver."

"Where am I?"

"In the sandstone cave in the forest."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"That depends. Wait till Timor comes, and you'll know soon enough. I expect him here after four. He knows the way into the cave. Lor', wasn't he scared though the first time I collared him for a lark, and brought him down the trunk."

"Enough to make him," said Ivan.

Jack leant against the wall and gave himself up to meditation.

So his fate depended upon Timor.

Perhaps they would starve him or put him to death in some cruel manner.

No one would ever discover him in such a place.

"It's a queer erib," remarked Bill Silver.

"How did you discover it?" asked Ivan.

"It wasn't me, at all. It was all along of Quicksilver. He's an imp of darkness,

he is, if ever there was one. He was chasing a squirrel one day, and it ran down the hollow of Herne's oak. Quicksilver was after it like a shot and down the hole he went, and of course found out the cave."

"Strange," said Ivan.

"He came and told me and I examined it. There were steps cut in the rock to enable you to go down the shaft, showing that it had been used by some one in former days."

"By Herne himself perhaps?"

"Possibly. All I know is it suited me as the police were hot on my track, and I and Quicksilver have lived here for nigh a year. No one knows of its existence but you and your nephew Timor, though I have had to dodge Gunstock narrowly more than once."

"It is very useful," replied Ivan, "and we have found it so since you and I have been doing business together. I don't know where we should have put our plunder if we had not had this cave."

"That's true; but we ought to be getting the stuff up to the Jew in Houndsditch."

"Wait till we have robbed the castle," replied Ivan.

"Yes. If we can get the Maharajah's jewels we can retire from business."

"Precisely. I want money to get back to Russia," said Ivan. "Let me see. The rajah is coming on a visit to the Queen to-morrow and will stay a week. His jewels are valued at a million."

"Whew!" whistled Bill.

"We shall have a nice little sum to divide when the Jew pays us. Come to Russia with me, and I will introduce you as an English lord."

"I'll do it."

Quicksilver had listened to these remarks attentively.

Quitting his lofty perch he slid down the side of the cave with incredible rapidity.

"What'll you do with me?" he asked.

"Put you aboard the training ship," said his father.

"Not for Joe."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh dear no, it isn't good enough, I want to be a young lord, I do, and dress well and have nice things to eat and drink, and cut about in carriages."

"You'll have a dose of the stick directly, you young limb."

Bill Silver stooped down and picked up an ash plant, the sight of which caused Quicksilver to vanish.

He was up the side of the cave in an instant.

"Ha, ha!" he cried. "You can't catch me dad."

"I don't believe old Nick himself could," replied Bill, laughing at the display of the boy's agility.

"You won't send me to sea, dad, will you?" continued Quicksilver.

"I'll make an acrobat of you," was the answer.

"But if you are going to be a swell, why can't I?"

"Well, I'll see about it. Wait till the job comes off and we've got the sugar. It will be time enough to talk about it then."

With this rather vague rejoinder Quicksilver was forced to be content.

Jack wished heartily that he had his freedom, for he saw that he was in the power of desperate and daring thieves.

Now he could understand how Mr. Dryasdust had been robbed.

Timor had let the thieves in at his window, and the two men Jack had seen in the moonlight were no other than Ivan and Bill Silver.

They had formed a plan to enter the castle and rob the rich Indian prince of whom he had heard, the Maharajah of Surat, whose jewels were worth a million of pounds sterling.

It was an audacious enterprise.

After some further conversation the two men quitted the cave together, leaving Jack in charge of Quicksilver, though secured as he was there was no chance of his escaping.

"I like you," said Quicksilver.

"Do you; why?" asked Jack, feeling glad somehow that the boy had said so.

"I saw you fight on election day. What's your name?"

"Jack Dashley."

"Ah! I heard some of the boys in the town talk about Jack of Eton. You're a hard slogger. I got aoner on the nose from you."

Jack laughed.

"I couldn't help that, you know, in the scrimmage," he exclaimed. "It was one down and the other come on."

"Of course it was, and though you hit me I landed you one."

"Quite right to."

"I hate, Timor," continued Quicksilver. "He's a beast."

"So I think."

"Once he beat me, and I have never forgiven him for it. Oh, he's a member, and a hot 'un too. I'm sorry they've got you here."

"You can't be more sorry than I am," answered Jack. "I wish I had taken little Effie's advice and kept out of the forest. But," he added, with a sigh, "it all came of running away. Always be a good boy, Quicksilver."

"I can't," replied Quicksilver, frankly. "It isn't in me. Dad says I'm a limb, and I believe I am. But I say, do you know Effie?"

"Don't I?"

"Ain't she nice? Oh, crumbs! I'd like to have her for my gal."

"She don't look a bit like a gipsy," remarked Jack. "It's funny how she got among such people."

"No more she is a gipsy," said Quicksilver.

"How do you know?"

"I have heard them talking about her. You see the gypsies came over here about twelve or thirteen years ago, and camped in the same spot where they are now."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and when they went back to Russia they stole a kid and took her with them. That kid was Effie."

"Really," said Jack, much interested. "You didn't happen to hear whose child she is?"

"No," replied Quicksilver. "The gipsies are too artful to let on about that. They had an idea of giving her up for a large sum of money, but they're all so fond of her that they can't part with her, so I s'pose she'll live and die a gipsy."

"Not if I can help it," cried Jack.

"You won't have much say in it," answered Quicksilver. "It's my opinion that dad will knock you on the head."

"Do what?"

"Put you out of the way—make cold meat of you. Timor has often said he wished you were dead."

A thrill of horror crept over Jack at this speech.

He was going to die, and the world

was opening so fresh and bright for him.

Then he thought of his happy London home, his affectionate father, and his loving mother, who, he being her only son, thought the world of him.

"Quicksilver," he said eagerly, "you say you like me?"

"So I do."

"Be my friend."

"I will, as far as I dare."

"Look here," continued Jack, "I am in danger. I know it, I feel it, and what you have just said confirms my worst fears. You can undo this chain and let me go. I will promise not to say a word to any one about the cave. Its very existence shall be forgotten by me, so that no harm can come to your father or yourself."

Quicksilver shook his head.

"I can't do it," he exclaimed. "You see that the chain is secured to your leg by a padlock."

"Well, suppose it is, what of that?"

"Dad's got the key in his waistcoat-pocket."

At this announcement Jack's heart sank in his breast, for however anxious Quicksilver might be to help him he was absolutely powerless.

"Couldn't you get the key?" he asked.

"I might when dad's asleep, but it's a risky game, and the wretching I should get would be a caution. Dad's a demon when his temper's up, and that ash plant of his cuts you like a knife."

"If you could help me," continued Jack, "I should never forget your kindness. Your father is going away with Ivan, and he talks of sending you to sea."

"I ain't going; not I, oh, dear, no."

"Then he may leave you to shift for yourself. I don't think he cares much for you."

"Only to beat and kick me again and make me work and steal," replied the boy sadly. "I've never had a kind word from him since mother died."

"You remember your mother?"

"That I do. She was good to me if you like," said Quicksilver, the tears coming into his eyes at the recollection.

"Now look here," Jack went on, seeing that he had made some impression on Quicksilver, "my father is well off, and I can always get what money I want

from him for a good purpose. If you help me to get away I'll take you with me, and you shall be my friend and I will pay for your board somewhere near Eton."

"You are going back then?"

"Yes; I find that I acted hastily and foolishly. I did a very foolish thing."

"What was that?"

"I let my temper get the best of me, and I shall give myself up to the head master, take my whipping quietly, and think no more about it."

"I shouldn't like to be whipped," said Quicksilver.

"No one does, but I believe I deserved it, and running away has taught me a lesson," answered Jack.

He was really beginning to see the error of his ways, and was ashamed of himself.

Where there is shame there may be reformation.

This was the case with Jack, who felt if he could only get out of the scrape in which he was placed and go back to Eton, he would submit to any discipline the head master chose to inflict upon him.

And no wonder.

He was actually in a most dangerous position, and there was no telling what might happen to him, if Timor chose to exercise his spite.

Ivan had no idea of mercy, and Bill Silver was not troubled with any compunctions of conscience.

"Will you help me?" urged Jack.

Quicksilver jumped nimbly down from his elevated position, and after throwing half-a-dozen catherine-wheels on the floor, standing on his head, and trying to dislocate his backbone generally, stood in front of Jack.

"I will," he replied. "Blest if I don't."

"Give me your fist on that. I feel that you can do much, if you will only try."

"You'll take me with you, and see after me?"

"Yes, do not doubt it."

They shook hands cordially, and the compact was made.

"I shouldn't like you to turn me adrift," said Quicksilver. "It's awful hard for a boy to get a living in these days, and a chap doesn't like being sent

to the training-ship. I don't want to be a bad 'un, like dad."

"I should think not."

"You see, I ain't really bad," continued the boy; "although I have had the steel."

"What's that?"

"Had a key turned on me. Been locked up, you know."

"I am sorry for you, Quick," exclaimed Jack; "and I promise I will always be a friend to you."

"Will you really, though?"

"I mean it," answered Jack. "If I get out of this, you shall always be with me."

"All right, I believe you," said Quicksilver; "you're not a bad sort. You've got a good mang on you."

"I don't quite understand you."

"What I mean is, I like your face, and I know that when we are together I shall get fond of you. I'm sure I should love any one who was kind to me, especially you, but if you were to discharge me, I'd break my heart."

"Discharge you?"

"Yes, that's the word. We may be friends, but I shall be your servant more than anything else. You're a young gentleman, and an Eton boy. I'm only—well you know what I am."

"You're not a fool, anyhow."

"Not exactly," said Quicksilver, who cut a caper and stood on his head, half way up the wall, having landed on a ledge. "I reckon there ain't much of the fool about me, and I'm bound to let them all know it too."

Whenever Quicksilver was excited or deeply agitated, he seemed to derive a peculiar satisfaction from standing on his head, with his feet in the air.

Perhaps he was better able to think in that somewhat abnormal position for a biped of the human species.

Presently he came down to earth again.

"What do you stand on your head for?" asked Jack.

"It's a way I've got," replied Quicksilver.

"Does it do you good?"

"Heaps. I never could sit about as other boys do. If I'm out in the forest you'll always find me cutting up trees. I'm like the thimble-rigger's pea, now you see me and now you don't."

"What a splendid sprite or gnome you'd make."

"Yes. That's what I'm cut out for. I once see a pantomime in Windsor, and I thought I should succeed in that line of business or else join a circus."

Jack assured him that there was something better in store for him, and they went on talking about the projected escape.

Quicksilver assured Jack that he would do all he possibly could to help him; the one great feat to be achieved was to get the key out of his father's possession.

That once done the rest would be comparatively easy.

"We could get out through the tree," said the boy. "But I think I know a better dodge than that."

"How?"

"There is a subterranean passage," replied Quicksilver, "which runs all the way under the park right up to the castle."

"Does your father know that?"

"Oh, yes; that is the way they meant to enter the castle in search of the rajah's jewels."

"I see," said Jack.

"But," added Quicksilver, "at the end of the passage is a big door. Dad took an impression of the key in wax, and is having one made for it; he's gone to get the key now."

"Then you'll have to obtain possession of both keys."

"That's it."

Jack was satisfied that once in the castle they would be safe, for no one would dare to follow them.

Reckless as Bill Silver was, he would hardly have the folly to run his head into a noose.

"There is one thing we have not settled, exclaimed Quicksilver.

"What's that?"

"You mustn't let on about dad. I wouldn't get him into any trouble. If we are asked any questions, we must cook up some story. Say we were after rabbits and fell into a cave which led to this passage."

"But the key of the door?" said Jack.

"Oh, we can throw that away, and tell them that when we pushed the door it opened."

"All right; whatever you say I'll stick to, for your father's sake."

Quicksilver was about to make some reply when a peculiar sound was heard in the vicinity of the shaft.

"They're coming back. Be careful; not a word!"

"Trust me," said Jack.

The next minute he had climbed up the wall in his monkey-like way, and with one spring reached a large ham which was hanging by a cord from the roof.

He sat astride this as comfortably and unconcernedly as a midshipman on the cross-trees when he has been mastheaded by his commanding officer for disobedience to orders.

In a little while Bill Silver, Ivan, and Timor entered the cave.

"Ha!" exclaimed Timor, directly his eyes fell upon Jack; "here is the caged bird."

"Yes," replied Jack. "But if I am caught in a trap by your rascally associate, I am not afraid of you, cur that you are."

"I'll see about that presently."

"Wait till I get back to Eton," continued Jack, who lost his temper completely at the sight of his enemy. "I'll expose you, my boy, and it won't be my fault if you are not expelled."

Timor regarded him with a look of concentrated hatred.

"You will never see Eton again," he rejoined.

"Why shall I not?"

"Because you will not leave this cave alive. Your bones will bleach in one of the passages which lead from it, and your friends will see you no more."

Jack was standing up, and he made a rush at Timor, but the chain stopped him.

"If I could only get at you," he cried, "I'd smash you."

The men sat down at the table, and drank some brandy.

"Don't waste your breath on him, nephew," said Ivan. "We have more important things to attend to."

"Granted; but he may as well know his fate, uncle," replied Timor. "I want to make him writhe."

"As you wish; tell him."

Timor extended his hand towards Jack threateningly.

"Dashley," he exclaimed, "you and I have been enemies for a long time. You

could not keep your tongue still, and told all the fellows that I was related to a gipsy."

"I did," replied Jack.

"Very well. I hate you for it. My uncle is a gentleman, and well known in Russia. He incurred the emperor's displeasure, and his estates were taken away from him. He is here with the gipsies because it suits him. A pardon is to be granted him, and so on; he will go back to his own country, taking his place among the nobles."

"Sorry for the nobles," Jack said sarcastically.

"Never mind. You have done me an injury. My friends in the sixth form believe the gipsy story, and they have cut me dead."

"Serve you right too," said Jack. "No decent man ought to be seen with such a contemptible sneak and coward."

"That is your opinion. Let me ask you one question."

"Go ahead and ask fifty for all I care."

"Do you know what the penalty of insulting an Ivanowitch is in Russia?"

"No, and I don't care."

"Yes, you will. If any one insults a member of our house, we do not have him sent to the mines, nor do we knout him. The penalty is death, and it is the same here in England; you have insulted me, and you must die."

"Die!" repeated Jack. "How?"

"Oh, Bill Silver will arrange that matter for you. I have pronounced sentence, and the executioners can do the rest."

"How long have I to live?"

"I leave that to Silver. It is enough for you to know that you are sentenced to death."

Jack folded his arms and leant against the wall proudly.

No further attention was paid to him, and the three conspirators talked to one another in a low voice.

Jack felt very much discouraged.

All at once he saw Quicksilver slip off the perch on which he had placed himself and turn half-a-dozen somersaults.

As he passed him he whispered—"cheer up,"—and dived away into the hidden recesses of the cave.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE.

TIMOR did not stay long in the cave.

He heard what his uncle had to say about the intended robbery of the Indian rajah, and his subsequent contemplated departure for Russia with the plunder.

Then he went back to college without bestowing so much as a word upon Jack.

Ivan remained until dark with Bill Silver, when he departed for his hut.

The bottle on the table contained brandy, and Silver devoted himself to the apparently congenial task of emptying it.

Smoking a short pipe and drinking brandy made him feel sleepy; his head nodded, his eyes closed, and the pipe fell from his hands.

Suddenly his head fell forward on the edge of the table, and he woke up with a loud exclamation.

"Quicksy! Where's Quicksy?" he cried.

"Here, dad," replied the boy, who had been entertaining himself by walking about on all fours face uppermost.

"What have you been doing?"

"Doing the crab, dad."

"Get my bed ready," said his father.

Quicksilver rolled a mattress from the corner on to the floor, spreading it out and throwing a couple of blankets on it.

"I believe I'm half tight—got three sheets in the wind as the sailors say," continued Silver. "I'll take a nap. But hold on, haven't I got something to do first?"

He scratched his head in perplexity, as if he could not exactly remember what was expected of him.

All at once he brought his fist down on the table with a bang that made the glasses rattle.

"I know," he cried. "I've got to kill a boy. Where is he?"

He looked round with his bleared eyes and saw Jack.

"Ha, ha!" he continued. "It's nice game to shoot at."

Drawing a revolver from his pocket he deliberately cocked and aimed it at Jack, who gave himself up for lost.

"I'll lay a shilling I hit him the first shot," he said, with a drunken chuckle.

The trigger was pulled.

Bang!

The smoke cleared off, and Jack was seen leaning against the wall unhurt.

Luckily the man had been drinking so much that his hand was unsteady, and his aim therefore uncertain.

"Didn't I hit him?" he asked. "I waru't used to miss like that. Here goes for another shot. Three shies a penny."

A second time he fired, but missed again, though the bullet this time went dangerously near Jack's forehead.

"Humph!" he cried. "No bull's eye? Blow the luck. I'll have to wait till I wake up. It's no use wasting powder and shot."

The perspiration had been pouring down Jack's face, for he felt sure the ruffian would hit him presently, if it was only by accident.

His last words were like a reprieve to a condemned man.

He breathed again.

Silver left the pistol on the table, and staggered towards the mattress on which he fell full length.

Soon he was snoring loudly, and unconscious of all around him.

Quicksilver, who had been afraid to move, now crept up to Jack and squeezed his hand.

"Narrow squeak that," he remarked.

"Yes, indeed it was," replied Jack. "I thought it was all U.P."

"Keep quiet. I'm going to look for the keys," continued Quicksilver.

He crawled on his hands and knees towards his sleeping parent, and put his finger deftly into his waistcoat pocket.

The ruffian moved uneasily, and began to talk in his sleep.

"Don't you do it," he muttered; "I'll be the death of you if you touch me. Drop it, old pard."

With two bounds Quicksilver was up at the top of the cave.

Silver did not really awake, he was only a little perturbed in his mind, and

rolling on his back he began to snore louder than ever.

Down came the boy again, and a second attempt was made on the pocket of the slumbering man.

This time he was more successful, for he contrived to extract first the key of the padlock, and then the newly-made key of the door at the end of the subterranean passage.

It had been an anxious moment for Jack.

On the dexterity of Quicksilver his fate entirely depended.

The boy held up the keys in triumph and promptly unlocked the padlock, freeing Jack from the chain.

Still Bill Silver slumbered on.

Quicksilver took up a lantern, lighted it, and beckoned Jack to follow, which he did noiselessly.

They did not dare to speak until they got out of the cave, but before he quitted it Jack snatched up the revolver, which yet had three chambers loaded.

He was determined to sell his life dearly, if it was again placed in jeopardy.

Quicksilver was evidently well acquainted with the entrance to the subterranean passage, for he did not once pause or falter.

At the extremity of the cave was a hole in the wall, which led into another vaulted chamber of larger dimensions.

To get into this they had to stoop and crawl through the hole on their hands and knees.

The second cave, like the first, was a natural excavation in a deposit of red sandstone.

On one side of this yawned a black looking gulf, which was the entrance to the passage.

It was about three feet wide and six high.

The uniform size of it made it resemble the work of men's hands, and it had very probably been purposely made in the old days of the castle for some purpose which will ever remain a secret.

The distance to the castle was about a mile as the bird flies, and the subterranean way was built in a straight line.

When the castle was reached, a flight of steps was encountered, up which Quicksilver went.

Up to this time not a word had been spoken.

Jack was congratulating himself upon his escape, when he fancied he heard the sound of some one running behind him.

"Hold on Quicksy!" he exclaimed. "We are pursued!"

Quicksilver at once hid the lantern under his jacket.

"It must be father," he said. "Don't shoot."

"But he will overtake us, and I shall have to go back," Jack replied, in perplexity.

Quicksilver did not doubt that his father had awoke suddenly, and discovering the flight of his captive, had guessed the direction in which he had gone.

He had to choose between his father and his friend, which was an awkward dilemma to be placed in.

"Is that you, father," he shouted.

Nothing could be seen in the thick darkness, but the hurried breathing of a man running was distinctly audible.

Jack grasped his pistol tightly.

"Yes, it is me," replied Bill Silver, in a terrible rage. "You thought to give me the slip, did you? Come back!"

"We're only having a lark, dad."

"Lark?" Fine kind of lark when you've stolen both keys. I cau tumble, my lad."

Jack cocked his pistol.

"Advance another step, and I will fire!" he cried.

There was a pause, and all was still, which indicated that Bill Silver had stopped in perplexity.

"What's your game?" he asked.

"Life and liberty! and I'll have it or die," cried Jack.

"Come back. I won't hurt you."

"Will the lamb lie down with the wolf?" replied Jack scornfully.

"I'll have you, my lad, if I do get an ounce of lead," exclaimed Silver.

"Show a light, Quicksy," Jack cried.

The boy flashed the lantern up the passage, and revealed Jack standing on the lowest step of the flight, and Bill Silver about a dozen yards off.

It was a striking scene.

"Now then, Mr. Silver," said Jack; "you see I am armed, and I shall as-

suredly shoot you if you attempt to follow me. Go back to your cave, and leave me to get out of this rabbit burrow in my own way."

Seeing that the odds were against him," he began to change his tone.

"I don't mean you any harm," he began. "—"

"None of your blarney," Jack interrupted. "I know you and those with whom you deal."

"It's all along of Timor," said Silver.

"Whose willing tool you are. Back at once, I say, and do not dare to pursue me. I have the advantage, and by Heaven I'll keep it."

Smothering a curse between his lips, the ruffian turned on his heel and went back the way he had come.

"We're out of that," said Jack with a sigh of relief, as Silver's burly form disappeared in the darkness.

"Come on, for Heaven's sake," cried Quicksilver; "you don't know my dad. He's up to every move on the board. There ain't a dodge he don't practise."

Jack hastened after his companion, and they mounted the steps with some difficulty, as they were crumbling with age.

They had to be careful.

If they missed their footing, they would roll down to the bottom and seriously injure themselves.

At length they came to an iron-bound door, and could proceed no further.

What was beyond they could only guess.

Quicksilver at once inserted the key, which he turned with some trouble, and the door revolved on its rusty hinges, pushing back some heavy arras or tapestry with which the door was adorned.

The boys quickly entered.

A voice exclaimed—

"Great powers! what's this?"

Quicksilver closed the door again, and the boys stepped from behind the arras.

They found themselves in a large room, in which a fire was burning brightly.

It was richly furnished in an antique style.

Standing before the fire was an elderly gentleman, whose face expressed the astonishment that he felt.

"Don't be alarmed, sir," cried Jack. "I beg to apologize for this intrusion, which was involuntary on our part."

The gentleman examined them by the light of the lamp which stood on the table.

"Where did you come from?" he asked.

"We were playing in the park, sir, and fell through a hole into a subterranean passage, which brought us to a door. Pushing that, it opened, and we are here."

"A most extraordinary tale."

"True, in every respect, sir," replied Jack with unblushing effrontery.

"From your appearance I should say you were an Eton boy," said the gentleman.

"Precisely. My name is Dashley. I board at Mr. Dryasdust's, and this young man is a friend of mine; and now, sir, whom have we the pleasure of addressing?"

"I am Mr. Vavasour," answered the gentleman. "I am one of the Knights of Windsor. These are my apartments in the castle."

Jack bowed politely.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Vavasour," he said. "Will you kindly allow me to sit down and rest?"

"With pleasure. Take a seat. Where's your friend? Ask him to take a—why, he's gone!"

Quicksilver had not gone, but, espying a bookshelf in the corner, he had made a hand-spring on the table, from whence he had vaulted nimbly to the top of the shelf.

"Don't mind me, governor," he cried. "I'm all right."

"Dear me," said Mr. Vavasour; "how did he get up there?"

"It's a way he's got," replied Jack.

"Very funny. Call him down. He might fall and hurt himself."

"He's all right. Don't worry about him, sir," said Jack. "You won't fall, will you, Quicksy?"

"Not much. I'm as right as the mail?" was the reply.

Mr. Vavasour looked at Quicksilver through his eyeglass wonderingly, and it seemed rather difficult to make him believe that he was not in danger.

"Are you going back to college tonight?" asked he.

"No," answered Jack; "I shall go to an hotel and return in the morning."

"I am well acquainted with several boys at Eton, and am an old Etonian myself. It is a fine school. I hope you will grow up to be a credit to it. But tell me about the subterranean passage. I never had the least idea there was a door behind the arras."

"The fact is, I got talking to some gipsies in the park," replied Jack, "which made me late. Then we chased a rabbit and fell into a hole."

At the mention of gipsies, Mr. Vavasour turned deadly pale.

"You are ill," Jack exclaimed.

"No," answered the old gentleman, "only a little faint. The name of gipsies always make me feel unwell."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly. What is known to all my friends may certainly be known to you. I had a daughter, as lovely a child as the sun ever shone on. Twelve years ago she was, I have every reason to believe, stolen from me by some Russian gipsies."

"Ha!" ejaculated Jack.

"Since that time I have never beheld her."

"What was her name?

"Effie was her name."

"By George!" cried Jack; "this is most extraordinary. I can find your daughter, sir. She is with the gipsies in the park. I have seen her to-day."

"Impossible!"

"It is as true as I live. Is she not fair, with beautiful hair?"

"Yes—yes!"

"And lovely blue eyes?"

"Good Heaven;" cried the old gentleman; "you have described her exactly."

Jack felt sure that little Effie was Mr. Vavasour's long lost daughter, and he proceeded to give his reason for thinking so.

Mr. Vavasour was greatly agitated.

He paced the room, plunged in deep thought, as if thinking what was the best course for him to adopt.

There was a decided family likeness between Effie and this old Knight of Windsor.

The Knights of Windsor, we may mention, are to some extent pensioners of the Queen, who gives them apartments in the castle and a certain yearly allowance.

They are for the most part gentlemen who have served the crown in some way, and who deserve well of their sovereign.

"I will send for the police," said Mr. Vavasour. "If this girl you speak of is my daughter, I shall know her by a mark on her left arm which resembles an arrow's head."

He rang the bell, and despatched a servant for the chief of the Windsor police.

Nearly an hour elapsed before the arrival of this gentleman, and Mr. Vavasour did not cease to ask Jack questions respecting Effie.

In time he became convinced that the band of gipsies, of which Ivan was the head, had really stolen his daughter.

When Mr. Simpson, the chief of the police, arrived, he listened attentively to what was told him.

Being a sharp, shrewd man, he did not altogether believe what Jack said about falling into the subterranean passage.

"Tell me the whole truth, Mr. Dashley," said he.

"I have told all I can," replied Jack, for he would not say anything about the cave, in order to save Bill Silver for his son's sake.

"There is some mystery about this," continued Simpson. "However, I will have the girl brought here at once."

He went to the door, where he had two policemen waiting, and despatched one to take a platoon of men into the forest and bring Effie to the castle.

When he came back he looked at Jack with a smile.

"Mr. Dashley," he exclaimed, "you must consider yourself my prisoner."

"What for?" asked Jack, colouring.

"You have run away from Eton, and I have had instructions to arrest you if found, and bring you back to school."

"But I am not a criminal."

"Far from it. I act for your good, and ——"

"You know the law would not allow you to touch me," interrupted Jack. "But I will go with you, as I intend to return."

"Very good."

As the chief of the police said this, he cast his eyes up to the bookcase, and saw Quicksilver.

"Halloo," he cried, in surprise.
"What have we here?"

"A friend of mine," replied Jack.

"I am afraid I find you in bad company, sir," continued Simpson. "That is Bill Silver's son."

"I know it."

"You imp of darkness, come down from there, and tell me where your father is; he's wanted."

"Find out," answered Quicksilver.

Mr. Vavasour in explaining matters to Simpson had told him all about the door which opened into his apartment.

Simpson began to think, and came to the conclusion that there was something beneath the surface which as yet had not come to light.

Acting on this suspicion he sent for a second platoon of police, and removing the arras, told them to thoroughly explore the subterranean passage.

No sooner was the order given than Quicksilver dived as it were from his perch, and eluding the grasp of Simpson, darted through the doorway.

"After him!" cried Simpson to his men, who filled the room. "He has gone to give the alarm."

To attempt to catch Quicksilver was utterly useless.

He had darted ahead, and, knowing the staircase well, succeeded in getting a good start.

There was no doubt that he had gone to warn his father of his danger.

One policeman in his eagerness to overtake the agile and fleet-footed boy, fell down the steps, breaking his arm, and otherwise injuring himself.

"It is a pity, Mr. Dashley, that you would not speak out," remarked Simpson in a tone of annoyance.

"I could not do so then. It was a point of honour; but I will now," replied Jack.

"Better late than never."

Jack then proceeded to relate all that had happened to him, much to the astonishment of Simpson.

"Well," he said, "that beats all. If anybody had told me that such things could happen in my district I would have laughed in their faces. But your information is important. The rajah must

be closely guarded. As for Bill Silver, I have been wondering for some time where he could have hidden himself.

Some time elapsed.

The sergeant who headed the platoon of police which went in search of Effie came back first.

Mr. Vavasour's anxiety was painful to witness.

"Well," exclaimed Simpson, who was a man of iron nerve, and never betrayed any excitement.

"The gipsies have broken up their camp and gone away, sir," was the reply.

"Cannot you find the girl?"

"We could see nothing of any of them, though their fires are still burning. In the morning we can follow up their tracks."

Mr. Vavasour sank into a chair with an exclamation of despair.

"My child, my child!" he moaned.

Soon afterwards the second platoon returned.

"What news?" asked Simpson.

"The bird has flown, sir," was the answer.

"How?"

"We found a cave in which is a quantity of stolen property, but neither Bill Silver nor the boy were there."

"Baffled!" exclaimed Simpson, biting his lips with vexation, "and by a boy."

Turning to Jack, he added—

"I will take you to the college, if you please, Mr. Dashley."

"As you like, though I would rather go to an hotel," replied Jack.

"I cannot agree to it."

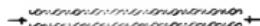
"All right," said Jack, shrugging his shoulders.

Simpson assured Mr. Vavasour that he would do all that lay in his power to recover his daughter, and after giving sundry orders to his men, left the room with Jack.

They got a cab in the town and drove at once to the college.

The clock struck nine as they crossed Barn's Pool Bridge.

Jack felt slightly uncomfortable, but as he had to pass the trying ordeal of going back, he wisely deemed it best to get it over.



CHAPTER XXI.

JACK'S LUCK.

It was with some trepidation that Jack saw the carriage drive up to his tutor's house.

He felt very mean, and much as a deserter from the army must feel when he is brought back to his regiment.

He knew the boys would chaff him, and fancied he could already see Funnybird Minor putting his tongue in his cheek and making faces at him.

If he did, he determined that he would promptly thrash him and put a stop to it.

He had not much time for thinking, because, when the carriage stopped, Simpson hurried him into the house as quickly as he would have run a prisoner into a cell.

Mr. Dryasdust was in his library correcting Greek exercises, and looked up in astonishment.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Is it indeed you, Dashley?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, putting a good face on the matter. "Come to give myself up."

"Very good. Who is that gentleman with you?"

Simpson explained who he was, and gave a brief account of all that had taken place, whereat Mr. Dryasdust marvelled greatly.

"Dear me," he exclaimed. "It's quite a romance. Gipsies, robbers, subterranean passages, and a lost child about to be restored to a sorrowing father. Poor Mr. Vavasour. How mysterious are the ways of Providence. I trust he will recover his little girl. Bless me, how strange it all seems. I am glad though you have found my plate in the cave. This will be a serious affair for Timor, I fear I shall have to expel him."

Simpson rose to take his leave.

"Now that I have done my duty so far, sir," he said, "I must go back to Windsor and see that the pursuit of the gipsy band of thieves is kept up."

"Good evening," replied Mr. Dryasdust. "I have to thank you very much for bringing back the runaway."

"It was more accident than skill," answered Simpson, adding, "Good night."

He went out, got into the carriage, and was driven back to the police-station.

"Now, my boy," exclaimed Mr. Dryasdust.

"Now, sir," answered Jack as gaily as he could.

"You have had some remarkable adventures; and, as you have made up your mind to come back, I will intercede with the head master for you. I am not sure, but I think I can get you off being punished."

Jack was much touched at this kindness.

"Oh, sir," he cried. "You are too good. I acted hastily and deserve punishment, but if you can get me off, I will promise to be a better boy in future."

"Eh, never run away again?"

"Never," replied Jack, emphatically.

"You have had a severe lesson, and I will do my best for you. Dear me, how dreadful it would have been if that rascal Bill Silver had shot you in the cave. No one would have ever known what had become of you. Think of your poor mother and father, what an awful blow it would have been to them."

Jack did think of it. His tutor's words brought the matter forcibly home to him, and he could not repress a tear.

"Crying, eh," said Mr. Dryasdust.

"Can't help it, sir. I am so thankful for my escape."

"Pray to-night as you never prayed before, my dear boy, for indeed you have much to be thankful for. Now I want to say one thing to you."

Then Mr. Dryasdust, laying his hand on Jack's arm, looked him fixedly in the face.

Slowly and solemnly the tutor spoke—

"You may think I am a quiet, studious old man, and that I take no interest in my boys," he said.

"Oh, no. I never thought that," said Jack.

"I assure you I have all your welfare at heart, and I want you to look upon me as your friend, and not your enemy."

I must be a little stern at times, with so many boys in my house. If the masters were not strict, they could never preserve order in a big school such as Eton is."

"No, sir."

"Well, then, will you try in future to come to me, as you would to your father, when anything troubles you?"

"I will, sir."

"Depend upon it, I shall give you good advice."

"I thought, sir," said Jack, "that you had a spite against me, because you imagined I destroyed your manuscript."

A sad sigh escaped Mr. Dryasdust at this allusion to his famous work.

"It was the labour of a life," he said; "and I did feel very wretched about it. Yet I am glad to tell you that I now know you were not the culprit."

"You know it?" cried Jack joyfully.

"Yes; the knowledge came to me in a very peculiar way. Funnybird Minor, who does not like Timor, picked up a note-book, in which the latter kept a diary. I have the book. It was brought to me by Funnybird, and in it is this passage."

He handed Jack a note-book, and pointed to a particular passage.

"Read for yourself," he added.

Jack read—

"Tuesday.

"Had an opportunity of getting square with Dashley for chaffing me about my uncle, the gipsy. Mr. Dryasdust had a manuscript book which he values highly. I put it in the fire, and Dashley being the only one in the library, as every one thought, the blame naturally fell on him. This is hit number one. I will give him another soon, as I have not nearly done with him."

"I always thought it was Timor, sir," remarked Jack, "though I couldn't prove it."

"I beg your pardon for suspecting you," said the tutor manfully.

"Beg my pardon, sir?"

"Why not? If anyone does wrong he should not be above making what amends he can for it. Do not be afraid of Timor, however. He will not continue long at Eton to annoy you."

"What shall you do with him?"

"Expel him. After what I've heard I could not have such a boy in the house. He must go. Perhaps the police will

arrest him, although I shall not advise that course to be taken. It would make too much scandal, and do the school no good."

"I feel that that fellow will be my enemy all my life," observed Jack.

"I trust not. Indeed, I do not see how it can be so. He will probably return to Russia, and you will be as far as the two poles asunder. Anyhow, if he is your enemy, you have a true friend in Owen Tudor."

"How is that?"

Mr. Dryasdust told him how Owen had elected to be flogged rather than reveal the hiding-place of Jack.

"By Jove! what a noble fellow he is," cried Jack, delighted beyond measure at this proof of his friend's devotion.

"He is, indeed."

"I always knew he was thoroughbred, and I am glad I chose him for my chum."

"Let us hope you will always be friends."

"I am sure I do hope so, sir, for there isn't a boy in the school I like so well as I do Owen."

Jack was standing up during this conversation, and his elbow rested on a pile of papers which had been lying on the table untouched for some time, if the dust which covered them was any indication.

In moving his arm, he pushed the papers over, and they fell on the floor.

A large roll of manuscript tumbled out of the heap, attracting Mr. Dryasdust's attention.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," Jack replied.

"Pick it up, if you please."

Jack did so.

"I am awfully sorry, sir, for upsetting the papers, but—"

"Never mind that. Give me the MS.," interrupted the tutor, who seemed strangely agitated.

No sooner had he received the roll and glanced at it than he uttered a cry of delight.

"Heaven be praised!" he said.

Jack was at a loss to understand what he meant.

"Is it anything important, sir?" he asked.

"My dear boy," cried Mr. Dryasdust, joyfully, "you have been the humble instrument under Heaven of discovering the manuscript I thought burnt."

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"AS I THOUGHT ! IT IS THE VILLAIN ! " CRIED JACK."

"Really?"

"It is my *magnum opus*—my great work, which I thought burnt—that which that bad boy Timor threw into the fire must have been a bundle of exercises which I looked for in vain, and my book has been hidden under those old papers."

Tears of gratitude overflowed his eyes.

"Give me your hand, sir," said Jack. "I must congratulate you most warmly on this."

They shook hands.

"Now, run away, and see your friend Owen," said Mr. Dryasdust. "I am too happy to talk any more. Oh, my book, my beloved book! The labour of the best years of my life is not thrown away after all."

In his rapture, he took up the MS. again, and kissed it as affectionately as a father would kiss a child.

"I'm as pleased," remarked Jack, "as if any one had given me a five-pound note."

Mr. Dryasdust put his hand in his pocket and handed him a crisp acknowledgment of the Bank of England to pay the sum of five pounds sterling.

"You have reminded me," he said, "that I ought to reward you."

"Oh, no, sir. I didn't mean that."

"Take it."

"Really, sir, I would rather not."

"Take it—I insist upon it. Never did any boy so well deserve it. Buy a new cricket-bat or hire a boat. Do whatever you like with it, only don't spend it in trash at the wall."

He alluded to the "sock," or sweetstuff men, who stood with their baskets at the wall facing the entrance to the quadrangle.

"Very many thanks, sir," exclaimed Jack; "good night. You will make it all right for me with the head master?"

"Certainly, I will. I flatter myself I have a little interest in that quarter, and it shall be exerted in your behalf. I shall get you off with five hundred lines."

"I'll do that in three days," cried Jack. "Ask him to make it 'short.' Ovid, sir, and not Virgil. The lines are so long in the *Aeneid*."

Mr. Dryasdust smiled and promised to do the best in his power, so Jack ran off to his room, thinking that he had got off

much better than he had any right to expect.

Nor was he wrong in this conclusion, for he had got out of the scrape remarkably well.

Many boys would have been flogged and turned down into a lower form, but Jack was always a lucky fellow.

When he reached his room he heard voices inside, and paused to listen.

"Get out of here," he heard Owen Tudor say.

"I shan't," replied the voice of Funnybird Minor.

"Jack will welt you when he comes back."

"When he does. I'll bet he's gone to sea. They'll never catch him. I say, Owen, taste this jam of Dashley's. It's awfully spiff."

"I wouldn't be so mean as to touch anything that belongs to him, and I want you to just clear out of here. I'm his chum, and I don't like to see his things touched."

"Take things easy, my dear boy," replied Funnybird.

"You take them remarkably easy."

"It's a way I've got. Look here; I've found some cold ham on the shelf. Try a slice."

"Not I."

"Somebody will collar his things if we don't. There's a Homer; just what I want. I lost mine yesterday, and I shall bag that."

"No you won't," exclaimed Owen. "When it comes to bagging a fellow's books I think I ought to stop it."

"Ba-a-a, you old Welsh goat," cried Funnybird.

"Do you want to fight?" asked Owen.

"If you like; I'm not at all particular, though if you hurt me I'll call my brother, and he'll settle your hash. I don't care for you any more than I do for Dashley."

At this moment Jack opened the door.

His appearance upon the scene in such an unexpected manner astonished both of them.

Funnybird Minor was so upset that he dropped the jam pot on the floor and stood open-mouthed, speechless with surprise, just for all the world as if he had seen a ghost.

"Dashley!" he ejaculated.

"My dear Jack," cried

come back to Eton. I am so glad to see you."

He grasped his hand cordially.

"Same to you, Owen," said Jack. "What's this object doing here? Eat-ing my grub, eh?"

"I'm very sorry, Dashley," exclaimed Funnybird. "I thought you wouldn't want it."

"What business had you to think?"

"Don't lick me this time. I'll never do it again."

"No, I'll take my oath you won't. However, I won't lick you this time. I feel too jolly to hurt anyone to-night. Pick up that jam pot and put it back on the shelf. You've spilt some, confound you! I've a good mind to rub your nose in it."

"Don't, old boy. Spoil a good mind for once. I'll make it all serene."

Funnybird took up the shovel as he spoke and threw the spilled jam into the fire.

"Now then, hook it," said Jack. "I want to talk to my chum."

"I'm going."

"Be off immediately, if not sooner."

"But tell me where you've been," persisted Funnybird.

"If you don't go I'll give you a oner in the mouth, and you'll want a new set."

"What of?"

"Teeth, you idiot," Jack replied, shaking his fist.

At this threat Funnybird took himself off, and the chums were alone together.

It can easily be imagined that they had a great deal to talk about, and when the supper bell rang they did not go down, for they did not want anything to eat.

It was much nicer to sit and talk.

Owen was intensely interested by Jack's account of the cave and the recital of all the danger he had gone through, but when he came to that part of his story which related to the subterranean passage, his delight knew no bounds, and he fairly clapped his hands when Jack told him about little Effie being the long-lost daughter of Vavasour.

"Why, it's as good as reading a book," he cried.

"I feel like a hero of romance," replied Jack with pardonable pride.

"Aren't you lucky. Fancy being let

off, and then finding the manuscript. Oh, it's almost too lovely."

At this juncture Bill Bragg entered the room.

"Back again, eh, Jack?" said he. "All right, slap-bang, and all alive, eh?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" asked Jack.

"A bad penny always turns up."

"Mean to say I'm a bad penny?"

"Not at all. That's only a figure of speech. You're true metal. Got the genuine ring about you, and no mistake. I always say you're a cock. Slap-bang, and all alive."

"Thank you. Sorry I haven't got half-a-crown to lend you."

"Oh, I'm not flattering for the sake of sponging. That's not me."

"Of course not. We all know that. Wouldn't do it, would you?" Jack exclaimed sarcastically.

"Not for the world; but it's just as well you came back to-night."

"Why?"

"Timor was going to sell all your things in the room by auction to-morrow."

"Was he? I'm extremely obliged to him, but I don't think Mr. Timor will be here to do it, even if I were inclined to let him."

"Indeed! that's news. What's the trouble?" asked Bragg, who always liked to hear all the news.

He was the great gossip of the house, and generally knew everything about everybody.

"Timor is going to be expelled," said Jack.

"What for?"

"You'd better ask my tutor. That's his business, not mine."

"I suppose you'll be whipped to-morrow and turned down?"

"No I shall not; so you're out there, you see."

"How do you work things?" exclaimed Bragg, in surprise.

"Oh, I don't know. My tutor and I had a little private conversation, and he welcomed me back as if I had been his son and he my father."

Bragg put on a knowing look.

"Ah, I see how it is," he remarked. "You know I am a friend of yours. There isn't a chap in the school I have a more sincere regard for, and I went to

old Dryasdust yesterday and asked him to let you off."

"Oh, what a whopper. You can turn 'em out."

"It isn't a crammer. Fact, I assure you. Always do a friend a good turn if you can, that's me. I'm the one to help a lame dog over the style. I try to act like a man, slap-bang and all alive, my boy!"

Jack did not care to contradict him, for he knew his weakness, and they continued to talk until it was time to go to bed.

Susan, the boys' maid, came in to let down the bed, and expressed her gratification at seeing him again.

Almost all the boys in the house came up after prayers to speak to him; he had quite a *levée*.

When they had all gone away and the light was removed, Owen still lingered with his friend as they sat over the fire in their nightshirts.

"Open the window," said Jack. "It's awful warm to-night."

The wind was in the south-west, and it was quite mild and spring-like.

Owen threw up the window and looked out.

"Halloa, Jack!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?"

"Come here. There's something climbing up the lightning-rod."

"Go on!" said Jack, incredulously.

"There is indeed. I do believe it is a monkey."

"What rot."

"It isn't rot. Come and look."

Jack did as he was requested, and actually saw something as Owen had described it, climbing hand over hand up the lightning-rod, which ran down one side of the house, passing close to Jack's window.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "That's funny."

"Shall I give it a hail?" asked Owen.

"Yes. I can't make it out."

"Nor I either."

Owen waited till the mysterious thing came up a little higher.

"I say, what are you?" he cried.

"I'm a boy," was the reply.

"Do you make a practice of climbing lightning-rods at night?"

"No, I don't; but I want to find out which is the room of Jack of Eton. I

know this is the house he lives in because I inquired, and I followed in his tracks."

"He means you," said Owen.

"Why," replied Jack, "it is—it must be my faithful sprite."

"Do you mean Quicksilver, the one you were telling me about?"

"Just so. I say, Quicksey, is that you?"

No sooner had Jack addressed him than the boy uttered a cry of joy.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed, "I've found him. Bravo!"

Making two or three rapid efforts, he came to a level with the window and sprang in like a cat.

"Well, I never," said Jack.

Quicksilver, for it was he, took Jack's hand in his, and raising it to his lips, kissed it with every evidence of affection.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "I'm so pleased. I thought I wouldn't find you till morning, and I meant to sleep in the yard till you came out."

"But I don't know what to do with you here, Quicksey," Jack replied.

"You said you would never send me away and that I should be your boy. I will work for you, Jack. I'll clean your boots and brush your clothes. Let me lie on the mat."

Jack laughed.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I'll fix you up a shakedown somewhere, and indeed I will not send you away; but I can't have you here always. To-morrow I'll find a place for you."

"Thank you. Anything is good enough for me if I am near you. I'm going to be an honest boy now and have no master but you. Who's this?" he added, as he looked at Owen.

"My chum, Owen Tudor."

"Does he love you as well as I do?"

"I hope so. We have always been the best of friends."

"And you like him?"

"I do, first rate," replied Jack.

"Then I shall like him too; but I shan't be his boy, only yours. You may do what you like with me—lick me if you please. I'll stand to it."

"No, Quicksey, I'll never beat you," Jack answered.

"I've got only you in the world now," continued Quicksilver. "Father's bolted."

"Oh, has he? Tell me about that"

"You know," replied Quicksilver, "that when the coppers came into the room where the old swell was I cut into the passage to warn father, for though he's been a bad 'un to me, I can't forget that he is my dad."

"Certainly not."

"Well, I gave him the 'office,' and he took the tip just as straight as I gave it to him, and telling me to follow, hooked it out of the cave. We went to the gipsies' camp, and he told Ivan all I had told him. The gipsies immediately struck their tents and went off, dad and I going with them."

"How did you get away?"

"Stop till I tell you. They went towards Ascot, and I think will pitch on the heath. I heard them talking, and father and Ivan and little Effie are going to leave the rest and hide somewhere."

"Did you hear where?"

"No; but they talked about ships," replied Quicksilver.

"Ah!" said Jack, "they mean to leave the country. They see the game's up and will no doubt try to get to Southampton."

"Shouldn't wonder. Well," continued Quicksilver, "I gave them the slip as soon as I could, and came to Eton. I asked a boy I met where Mr. Dryasdust's house was, because you told me you lived there, and finding it, I shinned up the lightning-rod and here I am."

"Capital!" Jack exclaimed. "You're a wonder, Quicksey. How you got up that little bit of iron rod I can't tell."

"Oh, that's nothing."

Owen had been playing with a cricket-ball, and he let it drop out of the window.

"Bother the thing!" he said; "that's a new ball. I'll never see it again. Some fellow will bag it before I am down in the morning."

"Do you want it?" asked Quicksilver.

"Rather."

In an instant Quicksilver was out of the window and going down the rod with the celerity of a lamplighter.

He picked up the ball, put it between his teeth, and was up again in a flash.

"There's your ball," he said, handing it to Owen.



CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. SODA THINKS SHE IS BADLY TREATED.

OWEN TUDOR and Jack did their best to make up a bed for Quicksilver—one contributed a rug and a blanket, the other a sheet and a pillow.

Between the two he was made very comfortable in front of the fire.

When Owen retired to his own room, Jack wished the little waif good night, and advised him to say his prayers.

"What's that?" asked Quicksilver. "I've said a good deal in my time, but never said no prayers."

Jack explained to him that it was not right to go to sleep without thanking heaven for all the mercies vouchsafed to us during the day, and to beg for a continuation of the same on the morrow.

"I don't quite tumble to it," replied Quicksilver. "You'll have to tell me more when you've time."

"Come here," said Jack.

The little waif crept up to him in the small room, only lighted by the fitful

glimmer cast around by the fading embers of the dying fire.

"Kneel down alongside of me," Jack continued, "and say what I do after me."

He then breathed a prayer, which, if it was simple, was at least honest, coming from the heart, and for the first time in his life Quicksilver prayed.

When Jack rose he got up too and went to his bed, while Jack got into his.

Half-an-hour elapsed, and Jack was nearly asleep, when Quicksilver said—

"Master Jack?"

"Well?" replied our hero.

"Do you believe in ghosts and bogies?"

"No, I don't. Go to sleep."

"But look here, I do. I've seen bogies in the forest, and you didn't pray to have them kept out of this room, did you?"

"Certainly I did not."

"And why didn't you?"

"Because I didn't think it necessary. Don't ask such stupid questions."

"Hold on a bit," continued the boy. "I have a reason for asking. I saw the door open just now and a pale face looked in."

At this communication Jack opened his eyes.

"What was the face like?" he inquired.

"I couldn't tell," replied Quicksilver. "It looked at you, and its eyes were like two burning coals."

Unable to tell why, Jack's thoughts immediately reverted to Timor.

He did not believe for a moment in supernatural appearances, and knowing that Timor was his openly-declared enemy, he associated his name with the face.

"Thank you, Quicksey," he said. "I'll try and keep awake."

"I'm like a weazel, and can sleep with one eye open," replied the boy.

They relapsed into silence, and though Jack tried to keep his senses about him, he could not do so, as seductive sleep stole over him.

How long he slept he did not know.

He had a bad dream, fancying that a horrible serpent had crept into his bed and coiled itself round him.

Gradually he was being choked to death.

Every moment he breathed with more difficulty, and his efforts to get breath were painful in the extreme.

When he awoke he was sensible of an acute pain in the region of the throat, and he gasped for breath.

Was the dreadful dream a reality?

Collecting his thoughts, he heard the sound of a scuffle in the room, and by the aid of the fitful embers he saw Quicksilver struggling in the arms of someone bigger than himself.

Springing out of bed he joined in the contest, seizing the stranger, and exerting all his strength, threw him on the floor.

Then he knelt on his chest, compressing his throat so as to render him incapable of further violence.

"Are you hurt, Quicksey?" he inquired.

"No, Master Jack; I'm all right. We've got the bogey. If it hadn't been

for me keeping my eye open he would have cooked your goose, though."

"What was he doing?"

"Strangling you."

"Get a candle. You'll find a bit on the shelf where the tea things are. Light it at the fire. I want to see who this wretch is."

While Quicksilver was obeying his order Jack's heart beat quickly.

Who was the vile creature who could steal into a boy's room when he was in bed, and, like a murderous Indian thug, try to choke the life out of him?

The candle was speedily lit and held up over the captive's face.

"As I thought!" exclaimed Jack. "It is the villain Timor!"

"Timor!" ejaculated Quicksilver.

Yes, it was Timor who had tried in this dastardly manner to kill the one he hated so much.

The miserable wretch was nearly black in the face, but Jack relinquished his hold and allowed him to breathe again.

"Pardon, pardon!" he gasped.

"Get up, you murderous villain," said Jack.

"Do not hurt me," pleaded Timor.

"Don't be alarmed. I am not in the habit of killing people in the dark," Jack replied, scornfully.

Timor rose to his feet and Jack grasped his arm.

"What are you going to do with me?" he inquired, nervously.

"I can't tell yet. I think I will take you to Collington's room. He is the captain of the house, and he can deal with you better than I."

"Have some mercy on me," Timor said. "I don't know why I came here to-night. Perhaps I have an evil spirit in me."

"Half-a-dozen. Their name is legion."

"It may be so. I never liked you, and something urged me to kill you. Let me go; I'll not interfere with you again."

"That's what you say."

"You know, of course, that I am disgraced and ruined. I shall have to leave here to-morrow. My tutor sent for me after prayers and said he was going to send me away from the school the first thing. He knows all. You told him."

In spite of his pretended humility, a vindictive glare shone in Timor's eyes.

This did not escape Jack.

"You Russian bear," he exclaimed. "You half-bred Cossack or Tartar, or whatever you are, you would kill me now if you dared."

"Yes, that he would, if he got only half a chance," said Quicksilver.

Timor turned fiercely on him.

"Hold your row," he cried. "We don't want any of your jaw."

"You'll have all I want to give you."

"Silence," said Jack.

He paced up and down the room in deep thought.

What was he to do with Timor?

If he let him go to his room he had no guarantee that he would not attack him again in the dead of the night.

It was a perplexing situation to be in.

"Come to Collington," he exclaimed at length; "he is the proper person to settle this question."

"Oh, don't take me there. Let me alone. I have suffered enough, and am as miserable as a fellow can be," replied Timor.

"March, or I'll make you."

"Have some mercy," begged Timor.

"You had none on me."

Timor reluctantly walked before Jack into the passage.

Quicksilver was told to remain where he was.

It was inexpressibly galling to Timor to be brought up before the captain of the house, because he was one of the "swells," and had hoped to get away in the morning before his disgrace was generally known.

Yet he could not help himself, and with dejected air and bowed head he walked along until they came into Collington's room.

Jack knocked at the door.

"Come in," said the captain of the house.

He entered, pushing Timor in before him.

Jack was in his nightshirt and without shoes or socks. He had not stayed to put them on.

Collington and Sutherland were sitting at a table which was piled with books, reading by the light of a student's lamp.

They were going up for an examination shortly, and had obtained permis-

sion to burn the "midnight oil" after the usual time for putting out the lights.

"What's this, Dashley?" Collington inquired.

"Timor attempted to strangle me while I was asleep, and I have brought him to you," answered Jack.

"Impossible!"

"Ask him if you don't believe me."

Collington and Sutherland regarded Timor with amazement.

"It's quite true," said the latter. "I don't attempt to deny it. Dashley has done me great harm. I am to be sent away to-morrow through him, and—"

"Don't tell such a pack of lies," interrupted Jack.

"Well, I'm going, anyhow," continued Timor.

"But what made you attempt such an outrage?" asked the captain.

"I can't tell you. I was half mad at the time. Let me go away. I will get out of my window and go up town to some hotel, and in the morning I will send for my things. It will be better than being stared at by all the fellows. I can't bear that."

"Are you really going?"

"Yes. I am to be expelled to-morrow. I'm bad, I admit it; but we have been in the fifth form together, and rowed in the same boat, Collington and Sutherland. I have done what I could to keep up the honour of the house until now, and—"

He broke down and burst into tears.

Jack could not believe in Timor's having feeling enough to cry.

He thought of the crocodile and believed rightly that he was crying from mortification and vexation rather than because he was sorry for what he had done.

In reality this was so.

The young man's pride was deeply wounded.

"I'm very sorry," said Collington, "that one of the fifth should be in such a position. I don't ask you to tell me what you have done, because it's none of my business, and I don't want to give you unnecessary pain."

"Thank you. All I want is to get away."

"There can be no valid objection to that. You can go if you want to. I

will explain all to Mr. Dryasdust in the morning."

"That will do," replied Timor. "I have a rope ladder in my room. Good-bye, Collington; farewell, Sutherland. We may meet again in after life when we are grown up, and I shall not forget the kindness you have done me this night."

He went away, seeming much relieved, but he took no notice of Jack, ignoring him as much as if he had not been there.

When he was gone the captain of the house looked at Jack.

"What's all this shine about?" he inquired.

"It's a long story," replied Jack, "and perhaps it is just as well untold."

"More mystery," remarked Sutherland.

"Dashley is right," answered Collington; "let the poor beggar go. If the fellows don't know anything they can't talk. Cut along to bed, Dashley, you'll catch cold."

Jack wished them good night, but he did not go straight to bed.

He was determined to see if Timor had really gone, as he did not wish to feel his snake-like fingers round his throat again.

Going to Timor's room he saw by the light of the moon that the window was open, and hanging from an iron bar was the rope ladder of which he had spoken.

The room was empty.

Looking out into the street he fancied he saw a dim, shadowy figure going up towards the college.

Presently the figure vanished from sight altogether, and that was the last Jack saw of Timor on that occasion.

Returning to his own room, he told Quicksilver that the Russian was gone, and they went to sleep again, this time with their minds more at rest.

In the morning Susan came to call Jack and light the fire.

She advanced to the fireplace, after giving Jack a shake, and stumbled over the body of Quicksilver.

"Lor' ha' mussy!" she cried. "What's this?"

Looking down she examined the sleeping boy.

"It's alive," she continued. "Drat

the little wretch, if it isn't a boy. Mr. Dashley!"

Jack sprang out of bed.

"What's the row, Sukey?" he asked.

"Don't you know it's agin the rules to have strangers in your room? Who's this?"

"A friend of mine."

"Is he an Eton boy?"

"No."

"So I should say, by the look of him. I should think he hadn't been washed for a month. I'll tell your tutor."

"Don't do that; he's going directly!" Jack exclaimed.

"Let him go at once then. Here, you, get up, d'y'e hear. I'm blessed if I know what the house is a-comin' to. Mr. Timor's gone off in the night down a ladder of rope. Get up, I say."

She took the poker and began to prod Quicksilver in the ribs as if he was of wo more account than a pig.

This heroic treatment roused him, and he jumped up, rubbing his eyes.

When he saw a stout woman making prods at him with a poker, he threw up the window and sprang on to the lightning conductor.

This speedily enabled him to reach the ground.

"Goodness gracious!" she cried. "He's for all the world like a rat. I never see such a thing as that in my life."

"That's nothing," remarked Jack, laughing.

He got into bed again, while Susan lighted the fire, grumbling all the while and wondering what the house was com-ing to.

When Jack was dressed, he went into school, meeting Quicksilver on his way, for the lad was waiting for him.

"What made you cut it like that?" Jack asked.

"I wasn't going to stay to be poked in the ribs by that woman," replied Quicksilver. "I'd just as soon be hyked by a cow."

Jack gave him some money to get some breakfast with, and told him to meet him after twelve at the beginning of the Slough Road, near Fifteen-arch Bridge, which he promised to do.

During the morning Jack was anxiously engaged in considering what he

could do for the little waif he had taken under his charge.

He determined to conduct him to Mr. Benjamin Soda's, and ask that gentleman to employ him as page.

That would give him some employment and enable him to be close to Jack, which was what the boy wanted more than anything else.

When school was over, he and Owen hurried to the bridge, where they discovered Quicksilver on the parapet, gazing into the placid depths of Fallow's pond.

"Well, my little man," exclaimed Jack. "Did you have a good feed?"

"First class!" replied Quicksilver. "A reg'lar tightener and no mistake. Passengers, eggs, cold boiled beef, 'am, and new bread and lots of butter."

"That's good," said Jack. "You won't hurt till dinner. Now I'm going to see if a friend of mine won't have you as a page."

"What's that?"

"Boy to wait on table and run errands, clean the knives and polish the boots."

"That'll do. I'm on," said Quicksilver.

They walked up the road until they reached Mr. Soda's house.

All was still and quiet within.

Some beautiful spangled bantams were strolling about in a wire house, and they attracted Jack's attention.

"Those would be nice for lunch," he remarked.

"Splendid!" replied Owen. "But what's the use of talking about it?"

"A good deal of use. I'll send my sprite in for them. We will make them a present to old B. and S., and I'll undertake that he shall invite us to dinner."

"Will you, really?" asked Owen, delightedly.

"Wait till you see. Quicksey, my man."

"Yes, Master Jack. What do you want with this distinguished individual?" replied Quicksilver.

"Get over that wire fence and collar two pairs of the spangled bantams, wring their necks and chuck them out."

Like a squirrel the boy climbed up the fence and got into the enclosure where the fowls were placidly picking, unsuspecting of coming evil.

With his accustomed rapidity of action, he caught the spangled bantams and killed them, after which he rejoined his master.

Jack took the fowls in his hand, and knocked at the door, which was opened by Mr. Soda in person.

"Ah, my dear boys," he exclaimed. "You have come to call upon me. Indeed you do me honour. Welcome—all hail."

"See what I've brought you, sir," remarked Jack, holding up the fowls.

Professor Soda was a little short-sighted, and he simply saw that it was a present of chickens.

"Capital. Very nice indeed; we will have them for lunch. You shall all have lunch with me. Come into the kitchen while I give my orders," he said.

They followed him into the kitchen, while Quicksilver winked and blinked at Owen, until that young gentleman had to stuff his handkerchief into his mouth to prevent himself from laughing.

Mrs. Soda was sitting near the fire, and the cook, a red-faced woman, of forty or upwards, was fanning her face with a frying pan in lieu of anything better.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" she groaned, "he treats me so badly."

As she raised her eyes, she saw Dashley and the others.

"Good day, Mr. Bashley," she continued.

"Dashley, ma'am!" he promptly said, correcting her.

"Ah, to be sure, Mr. Ashley. Glad to see you. That wretch there, whom I have the misfortune to call my husband, locked up the cupboard in which we keep our spirits. Now, Mr. Cashley, you know my family doctor advises me to take a leetle—just a leetle—drop of gin occasionally, medicinally. It is absolutely necessary, Mr. Fashley."

"It's a D, ma'am," he cried, adding— "Confound the woman, she'll go through the alphabet soon if she goes on this way."

"Well, as I was saying, Mr. Gashley—"

"Ah, hang it all, I can't stand Gashley," he interrupted.

"Pardon me, I mean Hashley."

"Now you're making a hash of it."

"So I am. Excuse me, my dear Mr. Mashley," said Mrs. Soda, "but my husband stopped my gin—that's the fact."

However, 'Liza the cook procured me some, just to settle my nerves, and I'm feeling better."

"You've been drinking again," exclaimed Mr. Benjamin Soda.

"Not at your expense," she replied, with ineffable scorn. "Oh, Mr. Mashley, I'm so badly treated—I'm such a victim; but what have you there?"

"A present of fowls, ma'am—lovely spangled bantams."

"Ah, very nice. 'Liza, some more medicine."

The cook gave her a glass of gin and water, which she drank rapidly and without winking.

"Fowls!" she repeated, abstractedly; "bangled spantams—no, that isn't it—spantled banghams; that's right. Thank you very much, Mr. Pashley, for the beautiful spantled banghams."

The professor gave orders to the cook to get them ready as soon as possible, which she proceeded to do without loss of time.

His better half's gaze became concentrated on Quicksilver, who, without anyone noticing him, had climbed up on the top of the dresser, and was calmly surveying the scene below.

"What is that, please, perched up there?" she demanded. "Can you tell me, Mr. Quashley?"

"A boy I have brought to you, ma'am," replied Jack, who had given up all hope of her pronouncing his name correctly. "He wants to be a page boy."

"Just what we require. It would give a tone to the house and an air of respectability which it is somewhat lacking at present."

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Soda.

"What's that you say?" asked his wife, sharply.

"Nothing, my dear. You can hire him if you like. Give him half-a-crown a week and his board. We have a suit

of livery which the last boy we had used to wear. He ran away, you know."

"Yes, he was a bad boy, and I was not sorry to lose him. Mr. Squashley, please call him down. We will dress him up and see how he looks."

Quicksilver was called down, and the livery of the last page brought out of a lumber closet.

The suit was decidedly small for Quicksilver, but they took him into another room and forced him into it.

"Oh," said he, as they buttoned the last button of the jacket, "I can't breathe. I'm afraid to move. If I do I shall bust up the suit. Let me out."

"Can't be done," answered Jack, gravely shaking his head. "Come and show yourself."

He marched him into the kitchen.

"Here he is ma'am," he added.

"And how very nice he looks," said Mrs. Soda. "Pick up my handkerchief, Alphonse. I shall call him Alphonse because it is pretty and French, Mr. Dashley."

Quicksilver made a wry face.

He attempted to stoop for the handkerchief, but made three ineffectual attempts.

The perspiration stood on his brow.

He trembled violently all over.

At last he made a prodigious effort, and grasped the fluttering cambric, but at the same time there was a loud report.

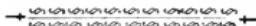
His trousers had split up the back, and every button had flown off the jacket.

The collapse was perfect, the catastrophe complete.

"Take him away," said Mrs. Soda, hiding her face. "He is a failure."

Quicksilver was conducted back to the other room and divested of his livery.

"I know'd what was a-comin'," he said, pathetically. "It was only a question of time."



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NEW PAGE.

IT was useless to attempt to patch up the livery that Quicksilver had burst, so he put on his old clothes and returned to the kitchen.

Mrs. Soda had been much annoyed at the collapse of the suit.

"Set to and help the cook pluck the bangled spantams," she said, "and you

shall have a new livery in a day or two. If you burst that, I'll beat you more for that than anything."

"Easy my dear, gently over the stones," exclaimed Mr. B. and S. "What are the words of the poet?"

"Poetry is trash."

"Not so, my love. Poetry is the highest form of expression of which the human mind is capable; he says that 'a soft answer turneth away wrath.'

"Rubbish!" replied Mrs. Soda. "Go upstairs and wait for lunch. If you say anything more, I'll—"

"Don't, my angel," he interrupted; "what are the words of the poet? 'A virtuous woman is five shillings—I mean a crown—to her husband.'"

"Where's my whip?" cried Mrs. Soda.

At this threat, Mr. Benjamin beckoned to the lads and hastened away, as he did not wish to subject himself to the pains and penalties which his wife usually inflicted upon him.

They gained his study, which was just over the kitchen.

A dumb waiter communicated with the regions below, and enabled anything to be sent up by means of a tray and a pulley.

"Suppose we have a little mild ale, my dear boys," said Mr. Soda. "I have a cask downstairs; touch the bell, Dashley."

Jack did so, and the next minute the doors of the dumb waiter flew open, and Quicksilver put his head into the room.

"What's wanted, guy'nor?" he demanded.

Mr. Soda adjusted his spectacles, and stared wildly at the apparition.

"Why bless me," he exclaimed, "if it is not that boy; I am afraid he is a rough diamond. Who'd have thought of his coming up that way?"

"Short cut," replied Quicksilver, "and saves the stairs. I saw the hole, and I cut up it."

"Come here. You mustn't do it again."

Quicksilver entered the room and winked at Jack and Owen.

"I shall have to whip you, if you don't do what you are told," said Mr. Soda, taking up a cane. "For what are the words of the poet—'Spare the child and spoil the rod,' I mean—"

He paused abruptly, for Quicksilver

began to climb up the bell-rope, being frightened, but it gave way with a crash.

"Hang the boy," cried Mr. Soda.

"What's he up to now?"

Quicksilver skipped round the room, with the rope in his hand, while Mr. Soda pursued him with the cane.

Jack and Owen began to sing—

"Oh, what are you up to now?

 Oh, what are you up to now?

 I tell you my son,

 I'll stop all your fun,

 Oh, my, what a dreadful row!"

Thwack went the cane on Quicksilver's back, and with a cry of pain, he darted on the table, and climbed up on the gas lamps.

No sooner was he seated, than the pipe gave way, and down he came, as he had done with the bell-rope.

The globes were smashed, but he wasn't hurt, and extricating himself from the débris, he looked indignantly at Mr. Soda.

"What kind of a house do you call this, anyhow?" he asked, with an air of injured innocence.

"How dare you break my furniture and fixings?" retorted Soda.

"Have'em made strong enough to bear me. I ain't 'eavy."

"A gas chandelier is not made to sit on."

"Why didn't you tell me so?"

"Get out, you young rascal," cried Soda, aiming another blow at him; but Quicksilver made for the shaft of the dumb waiter, and was out of sight like a shot.

A sprite could not have vanished through a stage trap more rapidly.

Mr. Benjamin Soda groaned deeply.

"You've made me a nice present in that page," he said. "I wish I could have caught him, I'd have tanned him. Why can't he sit on a chair, like any ordinary Christian?"

"Not knowing, can't say," replied Jack.

"Let us improve the opportunity," continued Professor Soda, taking down a book. What are the words of the poet? 'How doth the busy bee improve each shining hour.' Here is a copy of Euclid."

"I didn't come to work, sir," said Jack.

"Nor I," remarked Owen.

"Let us take the first proposition. If A be the centre of the circle B C D—"

Reluctantly, the boys worked out the problem until they came to the Q E D, and by that time the lunch was ready.

They ate it with a good appetite, Mr. Soda especially enjoying the meal and pronouncing the bantams excellent.

Scarcely had they finished, when Mrs. Soda entered the room.

"Benjamin," she exclaimed.

"My sweet life, what is it?" he asked.

"You're a fool."

"You have informed me of the fact, my love, on several previous occasions, but if I may venture to inquire, what particular form has my folly taken this time?"

"These boys have imposed upon you."

"How, my dear?"

"I had my suspicions about these bangled spant-spangled bantams, you know, so I went into the yard."

"Well?"

"Your fowls, my fowls, our fowls," she went on in a *crescendo* voice, "are missing. The boys have killed them and made you a present of what belongs to you. In fact you have been eating your own bantams."

"Confusion!" cried Mr. Soda. "They cost me a guinea a pair."

"Ha, ha!" said his wife, in a tone of triumph. "Aren't you a fool now?"

"I am," replied the professor, emphatically.

"Don't you think I ought to beat you more for that than anything?"

"Forbear, my dear," he exclaimed. "What are the words of the poet? 'You may bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him.' I acknowledge my fault; transfer your wrath to those who ought to be the rightful victims of it. I mean the boys."

"It's a good suggestion," answered Mrs. Soda, who raised her stick threateningly.

Jack and Owen had been edging towards the door, as they saw the storm brewing, and now they made a dash for the open.

Before she could reach them, they had gained the garden, and taking off their hats, bowed politely.

"Good day, ma'am," said Jack banteringly. "I'd like to stay for a mouth,

but I have pressing business at Eton, which calls me away."

"You wretch!" she cried.

"Awfully sorry, you know, ma'am."

"After them, Benjamin; you know I am a little lame."

"I—I don't see the use of it," replied Mr. Soda.

"Don't hurry yourself, old B. and S.," exclaimed Owen. "We can wait."

"I'll have my revenge some day, my lad."

"No doubt we shall meet in the sweet by-and-bye," remarked Jack.

Mrs. Soda turned fiercely on her husband.

"Will you see me gibed and mocked at," she asked, "and call yourself a man?"

"There is as much manhood in me, my dear, as you have left me," he observed.

"Oh, so you take the boys' part, do you?"

"No, indeed; you misunderstand—"

"I do not. Oh, I'll beat you more for that than anything."

"Hold thy hand," he cried, retreating into a corner. "What are the words of the poet? 'Strike but hear me!' Shakespeare, hem!"

His further utterance was cut short by his wife making a furious attack on him, which compelled him to take up a chair and act on the defensive to ward off her blows.

The boys left them at it, and walked leisurely along the road.

"I hate to leave that happy family," said Jack.

"Quicksilver will have a hot time of it," replied Owen. "I don't think he'll stay."

"If he doesn't I don't know whatever I can do for him," Jack remarked. "I have done my best."

They did not go straight home, but made a détour through the little village of Datchet, intending to return by way of the playing fields.

A lonely house, standing in its own grounds, and surrounded by a brick wall, attracted their attention.

The garden was overrun with wild weeds, the shrubs grew in the wildest luxuriance, the windows were grimed with dust, and it appeared not to have been tenanted for some time.

"What a ghostly-looking mansion," observed Owen.

"There's a face at the top window," cried Jack.

"So there is. Look! It is gone now."

"Didn't the face strike you as being familiar?" Jack asked. "It did me."

"Yes; I thought I knew it. Timor, wasn't it?"

"If I am not mistaken, yes, Owen, old fellow. I'll lay the Bank of England to a Bath bun or a China orange, that it was Timor."

"What is he doing there?"

"Now you've got me. I never was good at riddles. Ask me an easier one. All I can say is, there must be some mystery about it."

A man was seen coming out of the house, and they waited till he emerged from the weed-grown garden through the street into the road.

"I say, master," exclaimed Jack, "who lives here?"

"Dunno," replied the man.

"Is the house let?"

"It was let yesterday, and the parties have just moved in. I'm doing odd jobs for them."

"How many are there?"

"That's none of your business," replied the man surlily.

"What's the name of the family?" Jack persisted.

"If I knew I don't see that I have any call to tell you."

"You're a sweet boy, you are," Jack said.

"The pump won't work, the sucker's dry," answered the man, with a laugh.

"Oh, you're a beauty—I don't think."

"What you think don't matter much to nobody. If anybody asks you who lives in that house you can tell them you don't know, same as I did."

Chuckling to himself, the man went on his way, leaving the boys baffled.

"He was one too many for us," observed Owen.

"No matter; he's been told to hold his tongue, and that only increases the mystery. I'll keep my eye on that house. Timor is my openly avowed enemy, and I have a right to watch him."

Owen perfectly concurred in this opinion, for he imagined that Timor

could not be living so near Eton with any good purpose in view. He had been expelled from the school, and ought to have gone up to London to his family.

But then Timor was a peculiar fellow, and rarely did what anybody else would do.

It struck Jack that he might have joined Ivan and Bill Silver.

Perhaps the three of them had taken refuge in the old house, thinking that the police would never dream of looking for them in such a place.

In fact it was the last spot that even an intelligent superintendent like Simpson would have thought of searching for them.

Owen advised Jack to communicate his suspicions at once to the police, but this Jack refused to do.

He said that he was not going to do the dirty work of the police, and though Timor had behaved badly to him, he would not be the first to put him and his friends in a prison cell.

"I'll keep a watch on the house to gratify my own curiosity," he said, "and because I may learn something of little Effie, whom I want to restore to her father, Mr. Vavasour. But I will not play into the hands of Simpson."

"Perhaps you are right, Jack," replied Owen. "I didn't look at it in that way."

"I'm no thief-taker," Jack went on. "You know, Owen, we have to remember first of all that we are gentlemen."

"Yes, I acknowledge that," said Owen; "and though I am only a schoolboy I always try to think that we ought to remember we owe something to ourselves and the school we belong to."

"*Floreat Etona!*" cried Jack.

They were hurrying along in order to get back to their house in time for dinner, and leaping the stile which led into the playing fields, they saw Bill Bragg.

"I'll give you a back," said Jack.

"Hump up," answered Bragg.

Jack made him "a back," and Bragg took a run, but he had no sooner put his hands on Jack, than the latter fell flat, letting Bill fall on his head.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack, Owen joining in his merriment.

* *Floreat Etona*, "May Eton flourish," is the motto of the college.

"That wasn't fair," cried Bill.

"Why not? You're so heavy. I slipped."

"You've given me the gravel rash. Look at my face. I owe you one for that."

"Oh, it's all right. Give me a back," said Jack. "It's the same for you and me."

Bragg smiled at this proposition, for he thought he saw a chance of getting square with his tormentor, as he intended to do to Jack just what the latter had done to him.

"Go it!" he cried. "I'm down. Slap-bang and all alive."

When he stooped, Jack ran up, but instead of leaping over him, he gave him a kick which caused him to double himself up without any trouble whatever.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Bragg, picking himself up. "If you ain't the meanest man of my acquaintance. Don't you do that any more."

"Give me the same chance, and I will."

"Not if I know it. Do you remember my telling you how I have knocked a fellow's front teeth out with one blow of my fist, and no kid?"

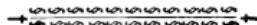
"Don't terrify us, Billy," said Owen.

Bragg continued to tell awful stories of what he had done in former times under similar circumstances, and the boys listened to him as they returned to college, yet they did not believe him, for they had got to know that he was not a strict adherent to truth.

They were just in time for dinner, for which they had very little appetite after eating Mr. Benjamin Soda's spangled bantams, but they appeared at table to save themselves from getting into trouble.

"I can't eat anything," said Owen. "Can you, Jack?"

"Not a mouthful," replied Jack. "But we will go through the motions."



CHAPTER XXIV.

SUMMER HALF.

THE time passed quickly.

Summer succeeded spring, and the "dry bobs" devoted themselves to the pursuit of cricket, while the "wet bobs," as they were called, disported themselves on the river, and the younger members of the school looked forward to the time when they would either be in the cricketing eleven or in the boats, the latter distinction being the great ambition of the boating fraternity.

No boy at Eton is allowed to go on the river until he has passed an examination in swimming.

This is why we never hear of an Eton boy being drowned on the Thames.

Both Jack and Owen speedily learned to swim, and they both passed at the same time.

The next thing to do was to hire a boat for the season, and they went down to the rafts at the Brocas' Meadows to choose one.

There were three rafts—Tolliday's, Goodman's, and Searle's.

Just as they neared the bridge, they

encountered Funnybird Minor, who accosted them.

"Going to choose a boat, Dashley?" he asked.

"What's that to you?" replied Jack, who had never liked him.

"Not much; only I have a skiff at Tolliday's, and if you and Tudor like you can have half of it."

"Declined with thanks," answered Jack.

"You won't accept my offer?"

"Not to-day, baker. Call to-morrow with a country cottage."

"All right. Here's your friend, Bill Bragg. Perhaps you would prefer to pull in with him?"

"I shan't ask you who I shall chum with."

"Perhaps it's as well. I see you are not at all particular," said Funnybird, with a meaning glance at Owen.

"Is that meant for me?" inquired Owen.

"You can take it as you like. If the cap fits, wear it," replied Funnybird.

Owen clenched his fist and ran at him,

but Funnybird was on his guard, and dived down an alley.

"Ma-a-a, ba-a-a, you Welsh goat!" he cried, as he disappeared.

Owen was swelling with rage and indignation.

"I only wish I was big enough to lick that fellow," he said.

"We can do it between us," answered Jack. "Let us give him a combination licking."

Owen laughed at this idea, and soon recovered his good humour.

When Bill Bragg came up with them, he informed them that he had hired a splendid skiff at Goodman's for the season, and all he paid was three guineas.

He added that if they liked to go in with him they could pay a pound a piece.

This proposition seemed a good one to the boys, more especially as Bragg promised to teach them how to row.

This was his second summer half, and he had arrived at the proud position of being able to "sit" an outrigger.

"All right," he said, when they agreed to share his boat with him. "Give me a skiv apiece, and the thing is done. Slap-bang and all alive."

They handed him the money, and he led the way to the raft to show them the boat.

"It's a darling," he continued. "You never saw such a daisy in your life. I call it a regular wave splitter. When you see it you'll say our gallant ship's a beauty, or I'm no judge."

When they reached the raft they saw the boat, which was named the "Lily," and a light, prettily-made, neatly-cut craft she was.

The boys were delighted with her.

The lad in attendance at the raft launched her, and they got in.

"I'll take the rudder lines and steer," said Bragg; "get into the bow, Owen; you row stroke, Dashley."

They just took their jackets and waist-coats off, not staying to put on flannels, as this was their first outing on the River Thames.

At first they were a little awkward, and caught crabs and kicked over their stretchers, but in time they learnt to feather, and by the time they reached the Brocas Clump, they were in a great state of perspiration, yet rowing fairly together.

Under the railway bridge Jack caught a crab, and went into the bottom of the boat, and at Cuckoo Weir Owen hit Jack in the back with his oar, because he did not keep stroke, nearly knocking the wind out of him.

By the time they reached Lower Hope they were rowing well together, gaining the applause of Bragg.

"I tell you," said Bill, "that I am prond of you two fellows. I never coached a better pair in my life. You'll do."

"Think so?" replied Jack.

"Ay, I do think so. I like your style, and I'll venture to say that you'll both be in the boats if you stay."

"I'm awfully tired," remarked Owen.

"So am I," said Jaek; "I ache all over, and my hands are all blisters."

"Oh, you've got to put up with that. It will go off after a bit," replied Bragg. "I was just as sore as if I had been beaten, when I started rowing. Now I'm slap-bang and all alive. Turn into this dead water."

He pointed to a sheet of water leading out of the river on the left-hand side.

"Where does it go to?" inquired Jack.

"To Clewer Mill."

They pulled into the dead water, which was an agreeable "ease up" from rowing against the stream.

The banks of the dead water were fringed with alders and willows, which made them look very pretty.

A couple of swans, belonging to the Thames Conservancy board, were swimming about, and hissing at the approach of strangers like snakes.

The next moment, with expanded wings, they hurried towards the boat.

Jack tried to drive the swans away, and after a while succeeded.

"I'll bet," exclaimed Bill Bragg, "that one of those swans has a nest of eggs. I never ate a swan's egg in my life, but I'd dearly love to."

"Why shouldn't you?" asked Jack.

"The eggs of these swans, my dear boy, are private property," replied Bill, "and if we were caught bagging them, we should get into trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"We should get into chokey."

"I don't care," said Jack. "Do you, Owen?"

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"BRAGG STRUCK DESPERATELY AT THE SWAN."

"Not in the slightest degree," answered Owen. "If Bragg really requires swans' eggs for breakfast he shall have them. I think we ought to do what we can for him after the able and skilful way in which he has coached us up the river."

"Hear, hear!" from Jack.

"Hear, hear, myself," put in Bragg. "I like to be praised. Flattery is sweet, but swans' eggs are sweeter. My gallant crew, piratically strike that swans' stronghold and procure me the dainties I desire. Once, when I was in the Isle of Man, I lived for a month on swans' eggs, I did. Slap-bang and all alive."

"Why, I thought you said you never tasted one," exclaimed Jack.

"Hum! not lately, I meant. That was a reminiscence of the past. Now, then, a strong pull, a long pull, and a pull altogether."

They bent to their oars, and shot the boat under some willows into the bank.

"Easy all," cried Bragg. "Back water! That's your sort! Ship!"

They shipped their oars. Owen sprang on shore with the painter in his hand, made the boat fast, and the others followed him.

The place on which they had landed was what is called an "eyot," or island, about half-a-mile long, and a quarter of a mile in diameter.

It was thickly studded with willows, and the rank riverside grass and reeds grew in profusion.

The swans, seeing that enemies were near their resting-place, speedily gained the shore, and while the female went to cover the eggs which she had only left for a short time, the male showed a bold front.

Owen, who was as venturesome as most Welshmen are, had run on ahead to find the nest.

By following the female, he quickly succeeded in his intention, and found the female standing in front of a beautifully-made nest with three eggs in it.

A boy is always excited at the sight of eggs, and the bigger the eggs are, the more excited he gets.

"Oh, Jack!" he cried; "oh, Bill, come here. I've found the nest. It's got three eggs in—such beauties—you never saw anything like them."

"I hope they're not sat on," said Bragg.

"Don't look like it; they're just as white as snow. Shall I take them?"

"Certainly."

There was no one looking.

Their boat was hard by, and it seemed the easiest thing in the world to take the eggs home.

"It will be just one apiece," remarked Jack, who had an eye to a swan's egg for himself.

But Owen did not understand swans; he was not well up in natural history, and did not know that when these birds were incubating they will fight like demons in defence of their eggs or their young.

They have prodigious power in their wings, being frequently known to break a man's arm at a single blow with one of their pinions.

"Oh, here's a picnic," said Owen, as he stooped down to pick up the eggs.

The female swan, however, objected to his interference with her domestic arrangements, and flying up in the air, gave him a blow on the side of the head which sent him sprawling.

"Gone to grass," cried Bragg. "Winged him, by Jingo!"

"Very neatly grassed indeed," said Jack; "and," he added, "so are you," for at that moment the male bird attacked Bragg, knocking him over as easily as if he had been a corner-pin in a skittle alley.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bragg, "I'll give that bird something."

He picked up a stick and hit the swan on the head, causing it to go round and round like a teetotum.

"Knocked him silly," he continued; "that's one to me."

The female swan, maddened at the contemplated outrage on her nest, and perhaps irritated at the eccentric conduct of her husband, who continued to spin around in circles as if he was not in the full possession of his right senses, again attacked.

This time it was Bragg who incurred her resentment.

He, however, still retained possession of the stick, with which he had overcome the male bird, and struck desperately at the swan until she too succumbed.

When they were both down, he hit them again.

"Don't kill the poor brutes," exclaimed Jack.

"If I don't they will kill us," replied Bill.

This argument was difficult to refute, and Jack allowed Bragg to keep off the swans while he took the eggs.

"To the boat!" he cried. "Here, Owen; take one."

Owen Tudor tried to lift his right arm, but could not.

"Why, what is the matter with your arm?" asked Jack.

"I'll be hanged if I know," answered Owen. "It hurts me, and I can't lift it. Is it broken, do you think?"

"I hope not."

Suddenly the deep baying of a dog was heard, and a man's voice said—

"Hi! after them lad—loo! loo!"

A big dog of the mastiff breed burst through the underbrush, and baring his fangs, barked at the boys.

Almost at the same moment a man, wearing the dress of a Thames waterman, appeared upon the scene.

"I heard you," he exclaimed. "Stealin' swans' eggs, are you? I'll learn you."

As he spoke he seized Owen by the collar roughly.

"Don't hurt me, please," said Owen. "I fear my arm is broken."

"Serve you right, too, you young vagabond."

At this remark Jack walked up to him with clenched fists and flashing eyes.

"I'm a boy, and you're a man," he said, "but I want you to understand that we are Eton boys, and if you insult us you will get your head punched, big and ugly as you are."

The waterman did not relinquish his hold of Owen.

"You've got them three swans' eggs in your pockets," he replied. "You've knocked the birds about until they are half dead, and—"

"In self-defence," put in Jack.

"Pack o'nonsense. The swans wouldn't have hurt you if you had left them alone. These swans are private property; they belong to the City of London, and the penalty for killing them or stealing eggs is imprisonment. You will, all three of you, have to come along of me to Windsor, where I'll lock you up."

At this declaration the boys looked very uneasy.

"Put the eggs back again in the nest," said Bragg.

Jack immediately did so, and the female swan at once crawled to the nest, hurt as she was, and covered them.

The male continued to stand on one leg, spin round now and again, and blink out of his eyes, as if he was not quite easy in his mind.

"That won't help you," exclaimed the waterman. "I've got to do my duty."

"What's that?" asked Jack.

"To lock you up."

"Can't we come to some arrangement?"

"No," said the man decisively; "we've lost lots of eggs lately, and we must make an example. I believe you Eton gentlemen are playing the mischief with the swans. All the nests from here to Monkey Island have been interfered with. I've got my punt close handy, and if you don't come quiet I'll have to use violence."

Bill Bragg began to bluster.

"I've never seen the waterside man yet I couldn't buy with a sovereign. Give him some money, Jack; that will satisfy him. Slap-bang, and all alive!" he exclaimed.

Jack tendered him some money.

"Get a drink," he said, "and call it square."

"Thank you," replied the waterman; "I don't drink. I am a teetotaller, and thanks to that I'm well off and above taking bribes. You will either come quietly to the police-station, or I shall have to make you."

There was no help for it.

Jack knew that Bragg would not fight, Owen had a bad arm and could not, while he could not tackle a big man all by himself.

"All right," he said; "I will go with you. I take the whole responsibility on myself. You found the eggs on me. That's enough."

At this self-sacrifice Owen felt unhappy.

"If you go, Jack," he exclaimed, "I will go too."

"Not a bit of it," Jack replied gaily. "My shoulders are broad enough. Go home and have your arm seen to."

"But I am your chum."

"All the more reason, dear old boy,

why you should let me see this thing out."

"Jack's right," remarked Bragg. "We will go and see about bail for him. Come on, Tudor. I'll scull you back to the raft. Slap-bang, and all alive."

Owen allowed himself to be persuaded, and Jack was marched off in custody by the waterman, who punted him down to Windsor.

They went together to the Town Hall, where they saw Superintendent Simpson, who shook hands cordially with Jack.

"In trouble again, Mr. Dashley?" he exclaimed.

"It looks like it. Seems that we are destined to meet," replied Jaek.

"Not been running away, I hope?"

"Oh, dear, no. This man has brought me here; he will tell you all about it."

The waterman hereupon began to make his complaint, stating how the swans had been disturbed.

"According to your own showing the birds are all right now," exclaimed Simpson. "I shall not take the charge. If you want to go on with the matter, you can proceed by way of summons."

The waterman looked deeply disappointed.

"Aren't you going to lock him up?" he said.

"Certainly not. Good morning. Step into my private room, Mr. Dashley, if you please," replied the officer.

Jack did so, and sat down, not at all sorry to have got out of this new scrape so easily.

"I used to know a little Latin once," said Simpson. "'*Omnis ab ovo*'—everything comes from the egg. You know pheasants' eggs caused you to run away; swans' eggs nearly got you locked up. Better leave them alone in future."

"You're right," answered Jack laughing.

"Have you heard anything more of Timor and the gipsies?" inquired Simpson.

"No; have you?"

"I cannot find any trace of them, so I suppose they must have left the country, but what is singular is, that I have received a communication from headquarters in London to the effect that large quantities of forged Russian rouble notes are in circulation, and there is reason to believe that they are being

made in the neighbourhood of Windsor."

"Indeed!"

Jack thought of the lonely house in Datchet where he fancied he had seen the face of Timor, but he did not say anything.

He contented himself with hoping that Simpson would succeed in finding out the criminals, and after partaking of a glass of sherry and a biscuit, which was generously offered him, he returned to college.

When he reached his room, he was met by Owen and Bragg, who were anxious to know how he had got on.

They were surprised and delighted at his good luck.

"Old B. and S. has been here while you were out," remarked Owen.

"What did he want?" inquired Jack.

"Quicksilver has run away, and he doesn't know where to find him. I thought he would not stay."

"Poor little beggar," said Jaek. "What will become of him, I wonder?"

Scarcely had he uttered these words than an organ-grinder stopped outside the window and began to play.

"Oh, hang that fellow!" cried Owen. "I'll give him a penny to move on."

"Wait a bit," Jack replied. "He's got a monkey. Quite a big one, too."

It was true; a large monkey secured to the organ by a long chain, the other end of which was tied round his waist, stood in the street, grinning, and holding up his paw for money.

Presently it began to dance, cut capers, and go head over heels, stand on its head, and perform other tricks.

"He is a proper monkey," remarked Bragg. "Slap-bang and all alive. Give me sixpence to shy at him, one of you fellows."

"Get your own sixpence," replied Jaek.

"Never mind, I've got a penny. I'll make it red-hot and chuck it out."

Taking a penny from his pocket, he held it in the fire by means of the tongs until it was very hot.

Wrapping it in a piece of brown paper, he threw it out of the window into the road.

The monkey picked it up, opened it, and had no sooner felt it than he dropped

it again quicker than lightning, uttering a loud cry the while.

Next moment he sprang on the wall, and began to climb up the lightning-rod with considerable agility.

"Can't the beggar climb?" cried Bragg.

The monkey reached the window-sill and jumped into the room, making a grab at Bragg's hair, of which he pulled out a large handful.

"Oh, heaven!" continued Bragg, "he'll make me bald. Pull him off. Confound the beast."

"You shouldn't have aggravated him," replied Jack, "and it serves you right."

Not satisfied with thinning his tormentor's hair, the monkey went on to hit him in the face and kick him on the shins until he bellowed loudly for mercy.

"Leave off; I'll never do it again," cried Bragg; "never—so help me bob. Slap-bang and all alive!"

"I'll take jolly good care you don't," replied the monkey, loudly.

At this the boys were greatly astonished, for they had never heard a monkey talk before, and they thought he must be the missing link between the ape tribe and humanity.

The monkey gave Bill Bragg another cuff on the ear, and Bill seized him by the tail, which, to his surprise, came off in his hands.

"Why, lads," he exclaimed, "what's this? Hang me if I haven't pulled out the beast's narrative."

The monkey sat down in a chair and burst out laughing.

"Don't you know me, Jack of Eton?" he said.

"Why, it's—yes, it must be Quicksilver," replied Jack. "What's the meaning of this caper?"

"I had to leave Soda's. Couldn't stand the old woman. I met the organ-grinder and got talking to him. He wanted a monkey, offered to dress me up, and here I am."

"So you thought you would visit me."

"Couldn't keep away from you. I get good pay, and in a week or two I shall come here and take a lodging in Eton, so we won't be far apart," Quicksilver replied.

"Are you doing well?"

"First class. It's Ascot races next week, and we expect to win money. Good-bye; my Italian's pulling the chain. That's a signal that I've been up long enough."

"By-bye; take care of yourself."

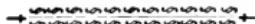
"Don't you fret; it's a cold day when I'm left. Mr. Bragg, I'll thank you for my tail."

Bill handed him the caudal appendage of which he had deprived him, and Quicksilver went away as he had come.

"What a rum chap he is," observed Owen.

"He is indeed, but I like his pluck. It shows that there are more ways than one of getting a living."

"That's as true as that I am slap-bang and all alive!" cried Bragg.



CHAPTER XXV.

ILLNESS.

NOTHING was seen of Quicksilver for some time.

Ascot races were approaching, and Jack had made up his mind to go to them, when an event occurred which he had not taken into his calculations.

There had been a great deal of rain, and Jack had been wetted to the skin, afterwards sitting in his damp clothes.

That this gave him cold there is no doubt, but he felt very ill also, not being able to account for a dizzy feeling in the head, a difficulty in seeing objects

distinctly, and a weakness of the knees.

One afternoon he was coming out of school, when he staggered and fell against the wall.

"Hold up, old man. What's the matter?" asked Owen.

"I really don't know," Jack replied. "The fact is I can't stand. Let me lean upon you."

"With pleasure, dear boy."

Owen assisted him home, and Jack laid down on the bed.

"I'm very ill, Owen. Go and tell my tutor. I want to see the doctor," exclaimed Jack.

The doctor was sent for, and by the time he arrived Jack was in a raging fever; his skin had turned fiery red, his mind was wandering, and he was laughing and talking nonsense to himself.

When the doctor had examined him, Mr. Dryasdust, who was standing by the bedside, inquired anxiously what the matter was.

"Scarlet fever," answered the doctor.

"Good heaven!"

"Bad case, too. It's very virulent in the town. I hoped it would keep out of the school. We must have him removed to the Sanatorium at once. Have the ambulance sent for, please, and keep everyone out of the room. I will wait here until he is removed."

Mr. Dryasdust went away to execute this order himself.

He met Owen Tudor outside the room.

"Please, sir, what is the matter with Dashley?" he asked.

"Scarlet fever," was the reply.

"May I go in and wait on him, sir? He knows me, and perhaps I——"

"He doesn't know anyone, for he is unconscious."

"Is he so bad as that?"

"Yes. He will go to the Sanatorium soon. Please tell the boys to keep away from the room, for fear of infection."

Saying this Mr. Dryasdust hurried away.

He was exceedingly anxious to get Jack out of the house for fear of the other boys catching the disease.

Two hours elapsed, and at the expiration of that time the ambulance arrived.

Jack was wrapped in a blanket and carried downstairs.

They placed him in the carriage like a little child.

He was quiet now, for they had given him a sedative.

No one was allowed to see him go away, and he was taken off like one plague-stricken.

Three days elapsed, and fortunately there was no other case in the house.

Owen was inconsolable at the loss of

his friend, experiencing terrible suspense at not hearing anything of him.

At last he could bear it no longer, but sought out his tutor.

"Well, my little man," said Mr. Dryasdust, "what can I do for you?"

"How is Dashley, sir?" asked Owen. "I am very anxious about him."

Mr. Dryasdust shook his head.

"Very bad, indeed," he replied. "I am sorry to say I have no good news to give you. His father came down from town to-day, and has gone to see him. We expect his mother to-morrow."

"Is he in danger of—of dying, sir?" said Owen, whose eyes were filled with tears.

"I will not say that. Let us trust in the overflowing goodness of God. While there is life there is hope."

"Oh, sir," cried Owen, putting his hands together in a supplicating way, "do please let me wait on him. I am his chum, and it will do him good to see me."

"Impossible; quite impossible."

"Why, sir?"

"You might catch the disease, and your parents would never forgive me for exposing you to such a danger."

"I don't care for that. I'll run every risk to be with my chum."

"The sentiment does honour to your heart, my dear boy, but I really cannot consent," replied Mr. Dryasdust. "Don't press me any more. Run away and play."

"There is no play in me, or work either," replied Owen.

"Cheer up. We will hope for the best. I will let you know how he is to-morrow," said his tutor.

Poor Owen went to his room, more than half broken-hearted.

"I must go to him," he muttered; "if I die for it, I will nurse him."

The rest of the evening he was puzzled in thinking how he could get to the Sanatorium.

If he once got in, he thought they would have to let him stay there, for they could not send him back to college, as he would be infected.

He was determined that, be the result what it might, he would go.



CHAPTER XXVI.

FRIENDSHIP.

THE next day, in pursuance of his heroic resolution, Owen Tudor, after twelve, put his books in his room and prepared for a visit to the Sanatorium.

What the consequences of his visit to his sick friend Jack Dashley might be, he did not stop to consider, though it flashed across his mind that he too might catch the fever and have to toss about restlessly on a bed of illness, from which it was possible he might never rise.

Yet it was his duty, and he could not stay away.

Owen was born of a courageous race.

The blood of the old Welsh kings flowed in his veins.

He had a pedigree a mile long nearly, and the Tudors were proud of saying they did not know what fear was.

Bill Bragg met him in the passage and wanted to know where he was going to.

"I'm inclined for a stroll in the country," replied Owen, evasively. "I've been working hard lately, and a walk will do me good."

"Come up the river with me and bathe," said Bragg.

"Not to-day."

"All right, please yourself. Slap-bang and all alive."

"If I'm not back at dinner-time tell my tutor that he knows where I am."

"That's rather a curious message to give anybody, but I'll do it. 'Stroll on,'" replied Bragg.

Owen quickly left the college and struck across the fields in the direction of the Sanatorium or college hospital, which was situated about two miles from Eton, in a healthy situation and completely isolated from all other buildings.

It was very warm, so he halted under a horse-chestnut tree to rest.

Scarcely had he seated himself than a chestnut hit him on the hat.

Looking up, another struck him on the nose.

"Confound it!" he cried. "I didn't know the nuts were ripe enough to fall yet."

He spoke these words aloud, and they

were answered by a loud laugh which came from among the branches.

"Halloo!" he continued. "This is like the story of the yellow dwarf. Murder, who is up the tree? Come down, whoever you are, or I'll shy stones up."

The leaves fluttered, the branches creaked, and down came Quicksilver.

"Well, I never," said Owen. "Is it you, Quicksilver? What's become of the Italian and the organ?"

"I ain't a monkey no more," replied Quicksilver. "My employer and I had a row about money. He didn't divide the profits fairly, so I grabbed all I could and took my hook this morning. I was coming to the school to see Jack of Eton, but as I had not had a climb lately I took a turn up this tree."

"You won't find Jack in the old place," said Owen, sadly.

At this announcement Quicksilver's face became clouded, for he anticipated evil at once.

"Has anything happened to him?" he demanded, eagerly.

"He has got the fever and is in the college hospital. I am going to see him now, for they say he is very bad and likely to die."

"I will go too," exclaimed the boy.

"No," replied Owen, who was more careful of others than he was of himself, "you must not do that."

"Why not?"

"Because you might catch the fever. It is not safe."

"Well," said Quicksilver, scratching his head with a puzzled air, "I can't understand that, if you can go why can't I?"

"I am his chum. It is my duty, and I would run every risk to be of service to him," replied Owen.

Again the puzzled air came over Quicksilver's face.

"I know I'm only a poor boy and haven't got any edication to speak of, while you are a college gentleman, but my heart is as big as yours, and you can't love him more than I do. You've

told me where he is and you can't keep me away. No, not a hundred college gentlemen could. I'm going—that's flat."

He spoke in a tone of determination which there was no gainsaying, and seeing he was thoroughly in earnest, Owen ceased to make any opposition.

"Have it your own way," he exclaimed. "I have warned you of the risk you run and I can say no more."

"May I come with you?" asked Quicksilver, whose face lighted up with a smile.

"Certainly."

They continued the journey side by side until the plain brick built walls of the melancholy-looking building rose into view.

"That's the place," remarked Owen.

"Many in there," queried the boy.

"Jack is the only one, as far as I can learn; so there will be lots of room for us," Owen said, with a gloomy foreboding.

They entered the grounds and inquired at the gate for Dashley.

The porter informed them that he was in number one room on the right hand side of the long passage on the ground floor.

"But," he added, "I don't think the house doctor will allow you to see him. His mother is with him, though he don't know nobody. You sit down on this bench while I go and call the doctor."

Saying this, the porter went away on his self-imposed errand, leaving the boys by themselves.

"Didn't he say number one on the right hand side of the long corridor?" asked Quicksilver.

"Yes, that's the direction," answered Owen.

"Then I'm going straight there. It ain't no good waitin' for that bloke to come back. He don't mean lettin' of us in. I can see that!"

"Indeed I think you are right. Come on."

Not staying for the return of the porter, the two devoted friends of the sick boy made their way at once to the apartment indicated, and, opening the door, let themselves in.

It was a small room, with plain white-washed walls, only relieved by a few illuminated scripture texts.

The blind being down kept the sun out and darkened the room, yet there was sufficient light left to enable the boys to see a lady sitting between the bed and the table.

On the bed was the form of Jack Dashley, the face red and flushed, and eyes burning brightly with the fire of delirium.

He tossed restlessly from side to side, and his cracked, parched lips showed how the fever was devouring him.

The plain deal table was covered with bottles.

Mrs. Dashley—for it was she—had for the last twenty-four hours been in attendance upon him, her husband coming down every evening when business was over, returning to town the same night.

She was a tall, handsome woman, plainly dressed in black silk.

Her expressive face was clouded with care and stained with tears.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Owen, "we do not wish to intrude."

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Friends of Jack's."

"What do you want?"

"To nurse him," said Owen.

"I am his mother," she exclaimed, "and I fear you can do him no good. This is the crisis of his illness. If he sleeps all will be well, but his system cannot bear the delirium much longer. The pulse is 120."

Jack moved restlessly and threw up his arms.

"Hush!" she continued, raising her finger.

"Well caught!" cried Jack. "Another wicket down! Oh, well bowled over! Two wickets in one over! We shall win the match yet! How's that, umpire?"

He fancied he was in the field playing cricket.

Then his mood changed, and his face assumed a stern expression.

"I tell you all!" he exclaimed. "That Timor is a villain. He is forging Russian notes with his uncle and Bill Silver. Where's Quicksey?"

"Here I am," replied the boy.

"Go away. You are not my Quicksey! You're a monkey!"

"I ain't playing monkey no more, Master Jack. I've cut that."

"Away, away! I know you. You're Bill Bragg. Halloa, Billy! Slap-bang and all alive, eh? Ha, ha, here's a lark! Look at old Mother Soda licking S. and B. She'll beat him more for that than anything. What are the words of the poet? Ha, ha, ha! won't we have a jolly spree!"

Then he fell back exhausted.

At this instant the doctor entered, and looking angrily at the boys, beckoned them outside.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

Owen Tudor, boarding at Mr. Dryasdust's, and come to nurse my friend."

"And you?"—this to Quicksilver.

"I'm only a poor boy, but I love Jack of Eton."

"I should have thought you would know better than to come here," continued the doctor. "It's ten to one you catch the fever. Does Mr. Dryasdust know you are here?"

"No, sir. He refused to let me come."

"You deserve to be soundly flogged for disobedience to orders. As you have been in the sick room I cannot send you back to the college. You will have to stay here for a few days until I see whether you get sick; if not, I'll disinfect you and send you home to your friends. As for this tramp—"

"I ain't no tramp," cried Quicksilver.

"You look like one, anyhow. Out you go."

The doctor grasped him by the arms and ran him along the passage.

"Cheese it, governor. I ain't done nothing," protested the boy.

But the doctor would not listen to him.

He put him outside the front door and shut it in his face.

Quicksilver shook himself and looked indignant.

"That's carrying things with a high hand," he remarked. "I'm bounced, but I'll get the best of him yet."

Quicksilver walked round the building till he came to the window of the room in which Jack was lying, and climbing up the cornice, got astride a projecting ledge, which enabled him to look in at a corner of the window which the blind did not cover.

There he could see Jack, notice all that went on in the room, and hear

everything that was said. The doctor was certainly outwitted to a certain extent.

Owen Tudor found that he had not improved his position much by coming to the Sanatorium, for the doctor would on no account allow him to enter the sick room again.

He was given an apartment to sleep in, and told that he might talk to the porter, and would have to take his meals with the matron. His only privilege was to waylay the doctor when he left Jack's room and receive the latest news.

The hours passed slowly enough.

It was growing dark.

He had had his tea, and was trying to read a book in the porter's room, but he could not fix his attention.

The lines ran into one another, and there was a mist before his eyes.

Suddenly he heard the doctor's step.

Throwing down the book, he went after him, and waited until he came out from visiting the patient.

There was a look of anxiety upon the physician's face.

"Well, sir?" ejaculated Owen nervously.

"It is not well. I fear we must make up our minds for the worst," replied the doctor.

"Oh, sir, don't say that."

"He is sinking fast."

The tears began to stream down Owen's face, and he sobbed aloud.

"Don't say he will die, sir," he exclaimed.

"God's will must be done, my dear boy. There is one inside there who loves him more than you, and her lot is hard to bear."

"Not more, sir."

"Bear up, or you will make yourself ill. All I can say is, that if a change does not take place before midnight it will be all over ere morning dawns. You had best go to bed."

"Oh, no, let me stay up. I can't sleep; indeed—indeed I can't," pleaded Owen.

"Very well. Go into the porter's room."

Owen went back very miserable.

Quicksilver had not quitted his post.

He did not care to eat and drink.

All he wanted was to listen to every word that was said.

Faithfully he watched on through the stillly night.

At eight o'clock Mr. Dashley arrived, bringing with him two of the most famous physicians in London.

They had a consultation with the resident doctor, and remained in the sick room until midnight, when Jack fell into a deep slumber.

So still was he that it seemed that he had fallen into the last long sleep, for his respirations were so feeble you could only tell that he breathed by putting a little piece of swans-down on his lips.

When the doctors retired, Mr. Dashley in vain tried to persuade his wife to take some rest. She stedfastly refused to quit her post.

Owen had to go to bed, but he got up when all was quiet and listened outside the door.

All was still as death.

Not a sound was to be heard.

So intense was the quietude that you might have heard a pin drop.

All at once he heard a woman's voice lifted up in prayer.

"Lord, have mercy on this Thy servant, who is lying sick unto death. If it seemeth good unto Thee, spare his life, that he grow up to do honour to Thy name."

It was Mrs. Dashley praying for her son.

Owen fell on his knees on the cold stones of the corridor, and joined in the supplication with clasped hands.

"Thou hast given, O Lord, and it is Thy privilege to take away; but for the sweet sake of Him who died upon the cross to save sinners, I beseech Thee to listen to the prayer of a heart-broken mother. Give to me my boy. Spare him, good Lord, spare him. Suffer him to live, for he is my stay and my hope."

Choking sobs were audible.

Strong man as Mr. Dashley was, he could not go through this solemn scene unmoved.

"Amen," said he, in a faltering voice.

Then all was silent once more.

Owen crept back to bed, wondering if the prayers of the poor mother would be answered.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OWEN MAKES HIMSELF USEFUL AGAIN.

THE long night passed, and the crisis was over.

Jack Dashley was to live.

The doctors said that he had had a narrow escape, and that it would be weeks before he was strong and well again.

But every day he would make progress towards convalescence.

On the third day Owen was taken sick, and had to go to bed.

He had caught the fever.

But the attack was slight, and by the time Jack was able to get up, he too was on his legs.

Quicksilver had gone back to Mr. Soda's when he heard that Jack was all right, and he often called to inquire about his friend.

When the boys were well enough to be moved they were sent down to Brighton, in the hope that the sea air would strengthen and invigorate them.

They almost regretted leaving the Sanatorium, for while they were getting

well everybody had been so kind to them.

All sorts of nice books were given to them to read, the best hot-house grapes, peaches, and pine-apples were constantly on the table, and best of all, they had been allowed to share the same room.

Jack was very grateful to Owen for the decided proof he had given him of his friendship, and told him he should never forget it if he lived to the age of Methuselah.

They did not return to Eton until the beginning of football half, when all the boys were glad to see them, and Owen was looked upon as quite a hero.

Boys are always ready to appreciate noble and generous actions.

Work went on as usual.

Timor was almost forgotten, until some one brought a report that the gipsies had been seen once more in Windsor Park.

"Who saw them?" inquired Jack, when Owen told him.

"Funnybird Minor told me," replied Owen, "and I think Bragg was the man he got the report from."

To Bragg's room they went, finding that young gentleman busily engaged in making experiments with the contents of a chemical chest.

"Keep out of the way!" said Bragg. "I'm making thunder and lightning. Let's see, which comes first?"

"Lightning, of course."

"So it does. Slap-bang and all alive. Look out!"

He blew some lycopodium through a hollow glass into the flame of the candle, when it ignited with a flash.

Then he struck some detonating powder with the poker, and made his thunder.

"Easiest thing in the world, my dear boys, when you know how it's done," he exclaimed. "What shall I do next?"

"Tell us about the gipsies."

"Oh, that's what you're after."

"Yes," replied Jack.

"Well, I was taking a stroll in the park to-day. It looked awfully gloomy. All the leaves are falling off the trees, and there was a frost this morning, which did not improve things. I got near Gunstock's lodge."

"By the way, how is he?" interrupted Jack.

"Right as rain. His wound is quite well, but he is to the full as bitter against the gipsies as ever he was."

"I don't wonder at it."

"Nor anybody else," Jack remarked. "They treated him badly enough. Go on."

"His daughter gave me some bread and jam, and a bottle of lemonade. Spif! Nice girl, that daughter. Slap-bang and all alive."

"Not so nice as Effie."

"Oh, wait till I tell you. She's beard about your Effie, and doesn't like it. She's dead spoons on you, Jack."

"Is she? I'm sorry for it, because it's all the good it will do her. The only girl I love in the world is Effie."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Bill Bragg. "Fancy falling in love with a little gipsy."

"Stop that!" cried Jack angrily, "or I'll lick you."

"What for?"

"Effie's a little queen. She's the daughter of a gentleman, and was stolen when she was young."

"Stolen when a kid? Quite a romance. Now look here, Jack Dashley, don't you go to hit me. You will be a beastly cad if you hit a man in his own room, and besides that, I won't tell you about the gipsies."

Jack had to laugh at this, he couldn't help it.

"Go on with your story, and don't slang Effie," he replied.

"Well, as I was saying, I had a good feed, and—"

Just then a boy with a bullet head, surmounted with any quantity of red hair, entered the room.

He was a stupid-looking boy, but very stoutly built.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I'm a new boy."

"Oh, you are, eh? What's your name — Carrots?" asked Bragg.

"No, it ain't Carrots, either."

"Perhaps it's William Rufus."

"You're out again. My name's Hardy."

"Is it? Much obliged for the information, but I shall call you Carrots, or Rufus, or both, just as I think fit."

"Oh, you can chaff me as much as you like about my red hair. I call it a nobby head of hair."

"Do you? Keep away from my chemical chest, please; you might set something on fire with your hair, and I don't want to be blown up yet awhile."

"You're too clever," said Hardy. "Is this the way you always treat new fellows?"

"Oh, dear, no. We treat them up to the knocker. Slap-bang and all alive, don't you make any error. I'll show you presently."

Bill winked at Jack and Owen.

"I've only just landed here, and want to know where I live," continued Hardy.

"What do you mean?"

"Where's my room?"

"Well, I like your cheek, blow me if I don't," answered Bragg. "I'm not your servant. You've got a nerve."

"Show me to my room. I'll give you a shilling, and as I have a hamper full of good things, you can have a slice of ham for tea, or the wing of a chicken, or a cut of spiced boar's head."

"Want to know the way to your room, eh? Well, I don't mind showing you, though that is the boys' maid's business, and I'm nobody's nigger. However, I'll show you."

Bragg opened his door again.

"Go ahead," he continued. "Step out, Carrots."

The new boy with the awfully red hair did as he was told, and as he reached the threshold he was lifted into the air bodily by a kick from Bill.

"Go straight on and you'll come to it, my tulip," cried Bill.

Hardy picked himself up and looked angrily at his aggressor.

"What did you do that for?" he asked.

"I showed you the way; that is all," was the cool reply.

Hardy, without saying another word, struck out and sent Bragg spinning backwards up against his chemical chest, which fell on the floor, its contents being all over the room; then he cannoned up against Jack, who pushed him against Owen, saying—

"No child of mine."

Satisfied with the revenge he had taken, Hardy walked away.

"Propped me in the eye, by Jove!" cried Bragg. "Who'd have thought it? I never did like red-headed fellows. I shot a fellow for doing less than that once."

"I think you brought it on yourself," said Jack, who had to laugh.

"I'll be a mark on that Rufus," continued Bragg. "Confound him! I wish I could get a piece of raw beef-steak to put on my peeper. It will go into mourning; that's a moral."

"Why don't you take it out of him?"

"Well," said Bragg, slowly and deliberately, "he's a new fellow, you see, and I don't like to be hard on him. Wait a bit; let him slip. I'll go on with my story."

"That's what I want," replied Jack, who was much interested about the gipsies.

"Gunstock says that he has seen the gipsies in the old park, but neither Ivan, Timor, or Bill Silver is with them, nor has he seen anything of Effie, though—"

He paused abruptly, for the door opened and in came the red head.

"I say, old fellow, how's your eye?" asked Hardy.

"Here's the sky-singer," cried Jack.

Bill Bragg retreated into a corner, as if he dreaded another blow from that powerful fist.

His eye had already begun to blacken and swell up.

"Well," continued Hardy. "Hear me smile."

"What?"

"Hear me smile. I planted that blow just right."

"Get out, you idiot!" exclaimed Bragg. "You can't hear anybody smile. You're off your nut. Slope!"

He threw a boot at him; the red-headed one ducked and it missed him.

Then he disappeared.

Bill Bragg looked astonished.

"By Jove!" he said, gasping for breath, "that fellow is the worst new boy I ever saw in my life. We shall have to take him down a peg."

Jack and Owen rose to go.

"We'll leave you to it," replied Jack, "and wish you luck, old boy."

"Don't go."

"Can't stop. If he comes back give him some thunder and lightning."

"Happy thought. I'll do it," answered Bill Bragg.

Picking up the scattered contents of his chemical chest, he prepared a charge of lycopodium for the new boy with the red hair if he appeared again.

When Jack and Owen returned to the former's room, Jack expressed himself as perfectly satisfied with the information he had received from Bragg respecting the gipsies.

"I am convinced," he said, "that Effie is not far off, and I also feel certain that some desperate deed is in contemplation."

"Why not go to the police?" asked Owen.

"That is a course I have hitherto avoided. I will make my own inquiries first. To-morrow I will go to the old house on the Datchet road and see if Timor and his confederates are still there."

"Be careful."

"Certainly I will. Don't you suppose I know the people I am dealing with?"

Jack was very much interested in little Effie, and wished above all things

to restore her to her father, whom he had seen more than once since his return to Eton.

The poor old gentleman had employed detectives, and advertised for her in the newspapers, spending a great deal of money to no purpose.

He could hear no tidings of her.

Simpson, the chief of the Windsor police, was completely baffled.

Never in the whole course of his experience had he met with such astute and cunning malefactors as Ivan and his gang.

That evening, while Jack was doing some Latin verses to show up the next day, Mr. Dryasdust came into his room.

It was his custom frequently to come into the boys' rooms and talk in a friendly, almost fatherly, way to them.

He tried to get them to trust in and love him.

This was much better than ruling them by terror, for if boys are treated harshly they will generally deceive their oppressor.

"Hard at work, Dashley?" he asked, in a kindly tone.

"Yes, sir," replied Jack.

"Nothing like it. What are you engaged on?"

"Latin verses. The subject is *Prometheus Vinctus*, sir. I have had it before, and it is an easy one."

"Yes; do not let me interrupt you. Are you comfortable and happy?"

"Very. I have nothing to complain of, and like Eton very much, sir. Nothing has troubled me, I assure you, since Timor was sent away."

"Ah, that reminds me that I have news for you."

"Indeed! What is it, sir?"

"I think Timor is coming back again," said Mr. Dryasdust.

At this declaration Jack was very much astonished.

"Is that a fact, sir?" he exclaimed. "I thought if a boy was expelled from Eton he could not come back."

"The head master has the power of doing what he likes. Timor's father, the Russian Prince Petroskowitch, has been to see him, urging him to inflict some other punishment, and the matter is under consideration now."

Jack looked very grave.

"I shall be sorry, for one," he re-

marked. "Timor is my openly-avowed enemy, and I shall have further trouble with him."

"Let us hope not."

"Will he come into our house again, sir?"

"Yes. I am very much against having him, but if Timor consents to receive corporal punishment—that is, to be switched and turned down into a lower division, I believe the head master will receive him."

"The boys won't like it, and it will not do the house any credit."

"We will be charitable," said Mr. Dryasdust. "If he should come, let bygones be bygones, and give him a chance to retrieve his character."

"I shall not speak to him."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I can't forget all the harm he tried to do me, and the best way will be to cut him dead," answered Jack.

Mr. Dryasdust did not try to alter Jack's determination, although he looked somewhat grave and pained at such a declaration of hostility.

"Which is Hardy's room?" he asked.

"The new boy with the alarming head of hair, sir?"

"Yes; he arrived to-day."

"Next to Owen Tudor's, sir."

"I want to see if he is all right. He is from Milton House School, which he left under peculiar circumstances, I believe."

"What were they, sir?"

"I do not exactly know myself. His father hinted so much to me, but I did not enter into particulars with him."

Saying this, Mr. Dryasdust wished Jack good-night and went on his way.

"Well," mused Jack. "I used to be proud of the house, but I'll be hanged if I know what it is coming to now. Timor coming back, and this red-haired genius, who left his last school under peculiar circumstances, arriving here, make it look as if we were going in for black sheep wholesale, with a liberal discount off for cash."

That night he thought over his resolve to try and find Effie.

She came to him in a dream, holding out her arms and begging him to help her, for she was in great distress.

He awoke with a start, crying—

"Effie, my darling, I am here!"

The grey dawn was visible through the window, and he fancied he saw something white and shadowy vanishing in the extreme distance.

This dream and apparition confirmed him in his resolution, and after school was over he started on his expedition.

Owen wanted to come with him, but he would not let him, because if there was any danger to be incurred he wanted to bear it himself, without dragging his friend into it.

On the way he passed Mr. Soda's house.

Not intending to go in, he hurried by, but Quicksilver happened to be on the roof and saw him.

"Hey, Master Jack," he cried, "where are you off to?"

"I've got business to attend to," was the reply.

"What business?"

"I'm in training for a walking-match. Five pounds a side. Three miles, out and home."

"My word! Hope you'll win. Let me come and train with you."

"Stop where you are."

"I'm coming down. Mrs. Soda set the kitchen-chimney on fire throwing a paraffin lamp at her husband, and I had to come up here to stop the draught, so I sat on the chimney-pot. Hold on, Master Jack, I'm a-coming."

He might have gone down a trap-door, but there was a pear-tree growing near by.

It was trained up the side of the house, and he preferred going that way.

Jack had to enter the grounds.

"You'll break your neck some day, young man, as sure as fate," he remarked.

"What's the odds? We is all got to die some day," replied Quicksilver, carelessly.

The bell began to ring furiously.

"They're calling you," said Jack.

"Let 'em call. Master's having a hot time of it. He ordered a wig yesterday."

"What for?"

"The old woman went for his scalp yesterday, and I don't believe the best hair-restorer in the country would do him any good."

"What are the words of the poet?" said Jack, laughing.

"Give it up, Master Jack. The governor will tell you if you step inside."

"Not to-day, Quicksilver. I've got to come up to-morrow. It's coaching night."

"Master Jack," continued Quicksilver, "I wish you would stay. I had bad dreams about you these last three nights."

"Nothing will happen to me; don't be afraid," Jack said, cheerfully.

He walked rapidly away, but Quicksilver determined to follow him, and disregarding the noisy summons of the bell, he kept Jack in sight as he went up the road.

Jack soon found the house where he had seen the face at the window.

It was in the same neglected condition, but the path leading to the front door had been trampled upon.

Going boldly up he knocked at the door.

Quicksilver hid behind the trunk of a tree, wondering what business Jack could have there.

The door was opened, and before Jack could utter a word he was seized by the collar of his coat and dragged into the house, the door being instantly closed behind him.

He was taken into a darkened room.

The shutters were up, the blinds down, and the apartment lighted only by a lamp.

Seated in arm-chairs were Ivan and Timor.

"Stand there," said his captor, who was no other than Bill Silver.

Jack saw that he was caught in a trap.

"So, Mr. Dashley, you couldn't keep away?" exclaimed Ivan.

Jack made no answer.

"Quite fond of us, isn't he?" said Timor, with a sneer.

"You escaped from us when we had you in the cave, but we have been expecting you," continued Ivan, "and I assure you we have made extensive preparations for you."

"Let me go," cried Jack.

"Oh, dear no. Couldn't think of parting with you after so long a separation. Sit down while Silver prepares your dungeon cell."

"What do you mean?" cried Jack.

"Simply that we have a lovely cellar underground, the only communication

with which is through a trap-door. There is plenty of straw. You will have one loaf of bread and a pitcher of water, not to do you good, but to prolong your only."

"You'll get yourself into trouble, let tell you that," said Jack.

"We will run the risk of incurring ur displeasure," replied Timor.

Jack got angry, and giving Bill Silver a push, began to make his way towards the door.

"Stop him, Silver," cried Ivan; "he does not appreciate our kindness."

Bill Silver immediately gave Jack a blow with his fist which caused him to reel against the wall, where he stood for a moment, stunned and bleeding.

"Cowards!" he stammered.

"Don't become abusive, dear boy," exclaimed Timor. "It won't do you any good."

"I want to go home," Jack said, feeling sorry that he had been rash enough to enter the house.

"Poor fellow," replied Ivan. "It's a pity that you are so homesick. I regret exceedingly that we cannot oblige you."

"Thieves and robbers!" cried Jack. "You are forging Russian bank-notes, and I know it."

Ivan laughed.

"How precise his information is," he answered. "Silver, show him some of our latest productions. If he is a judge of high art he cannot help but admire them."

Bill opened a drawer, and produced a bundle of skilfully-executed notes, which he held up for Jack's inspection.

"It will all come home to you," said Jack, "and if you offer me any violence you will suffer for it."

"In what way, eh, my bantam?"

Jack was about to say that his friend Owen Tudor knew where he was, but he thought on reflection that he had better say nothing about it, so he maintained an obstinate silence.

"Answer my question, you English dog," cried Ivan.

"I will not, you Russian bear," he replied.

"Kill the fool out of the way, and we shall have no more trouble with him!" exclaimed Timor.

"No, no; we will shed no blood. He has rushed on his fate. Die he must,

because he knows too much, and it would not be safe to let him go."

"Very well, uncle, have your own way," replied Timor, "only take him out of my sight. I shall shoot him if he stays here."

Ivan waved his hand, which was a signal to Bill Silver to remove the prisoner, which he did in his usual rough manner.

It was useless to resist, and Jack suffered himself to be dragged down to the cellar of which Ivan had spoken.

The trap-door was lifted, disclosing a black gulf.

"Down you go," cried Silver.

"Oh, don't put me in like a dead rat," said Jack. "I might break my leg."

"What's the odds? You've got to die of starvation."

"Silver," said Jack, making a last attempt to move his captor, "it's no use talking to those Russians upstairs; but you are an Englishman."

"I know that without your telling me."

"I've been good to your boy, Silver. When you had to go away, I got him a place."

"Nonsense. It was you who ruined him. Where is he now?" demanded Silver.

"Will you let me go if I tell you?"

"Not much. I don't care for the brat. He can go and hang himself if he likes."

"You're an unnatural parent. You ought to have some feeling for your son."

"He's old enough to take care of himself. What do I want with him? Now then, make ready; down with you," Silver replied.

He gave Jack a push and sent him down the trap-door, which immediately closed over him.

Fortunately he had not far to fall, and only sustained a shock without breaking any bones, as he had feared he might.

All was pitchy darkness, there being no window, or even hole, for ventilation.

The atmosphere was damp and fetid.

Groping on his hands and knees, he felt a heap of mouldy straw, upon which he sat down.

"I didn't expect this," he muttered, "or I wouldn't have come. My only hope now is in Owen."

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"HARRY STRUCK OUT AND SENT BRAGG SPINNING BACKWARDS."

We must leave him in the solitude of the dungeon to return to Quicksilver, who had climbed into a tree to await Jack's return.

He had seen the door open and some one drag him into the house, which caused him great uneasiness.

Two hours passed and there were no signs of Jack.

He was beginning to despair of seeing him again, when the door opened and Bill Silver came out.

"Why, there's my dad," he said to himself; "what's he up to?"

Silver held a jug in his hand, as if he was going for beer at the public-house, and passed right under the tree.

"Hey!" cried Quicksilver.

His father looked up in surprise and beheld his son.

"You imp!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing perched up there?"

"I ain't doing nothing."

"Come down."

"I shan't, unless you promise not to lick me," replied Quicksilver.

"We'll see about that," cried his father, who began to throw stones at him, but the tree was a tall elm, and the boy dodged about from branch to branch with almost incredible rapidity.

Just inside the garden was an axe.

Setting down the jug, he took up the axe, and, with a chuckle, began to chop the tree.

"What are you up to now, dad?" inquired Quicksilver, who felt the tree quiver, responsive to the first stroke of the axe.

"Cutting the blessed old tree down. If I can't get you one way I will another," was the answer.

The boy had not anticipated this.

He resolved to try and make terms.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"You'll have to come and live along of me, my lad, and wait on me, same as you did when we were in the cave in the forest."

"All right; I'll come if you won't beat me," replied Quicksilver.

He descended the tree quickly, and Bill stretched out his hand to seize him, but he slipped underneath his arm and ran up the road like lightning.

It was useless for Bill to try and overtake him; the result would have

been like a contest of speed between a cart and a race-horse.

"Dash the luck!" he cried. "That boy knows too much for me. What he doesn't know isn't worth knowing."

Quicksilver stopped when he had gone a safe distance, and, looking at his irate father, put his finger very rudely to his nose.

"Sold again, old man!" he exclaimed.

It was an irreverent thing for a son to do to a father, but considering the character of that father it was perhaps justifiable under the circumstances.

"Oh, you limb!" said Bill; "wait till we meet again. It'll keep—no matter—it'll lose nothing by keeping. I'll pay you."

Shaking his fist, he possessed himself once more of the pitcher, and started off after the beer.

It did not occur to Bill for a moment that his son had seen anything of Jack's disappearance, consequently the forgers took no manner of precaution, nor did they think it at all necessary to be on their guard.

The forgers had occupied the old house so long without molestation, that they had become foolhardy and indifferent to danger.

Quicksilver had sense enough to know that as Jack did not issue from the house again, he was in peril, so he hastened to the college to consult with Owen.

Owen was in school, so he waited in the street near his house until he came out.

"Ah, Quicksey!" cried Owen, who had been surprised at Jack's absence from school. "Have you seen Jack?"

"Yes. I think he wants help," replied the boy.

Owen was anxious to know what had happened to him, and listened attentively to all that he was told.

"This is very serious," he observed. "I was afraid that something like this would take place when Dashley told me where he was going. We must warn the police at once."

"You don't think they have killed him?" asked Quicksilver, anxiously.

"I am sure of one thing."

"What's that?"

"If they haven't, they will, for Timor will never let Jack go out of that house alive, if he can help it," said Owen. "I

think I will go to Mr. Simpson without any delay, and we will attack the house at nightfall."

Quicksilver no sooner heard this than he thought of his father.

He was very anxious to save Jack, but at the same time he did not want any harm to happen to his parent.

"All right," he replied. "You go to the police, Master Owen, and I'll go back and watch the house, so that I can tell you if anybody escapes."

"Do so."

They shook hands and separated, each going in a different direction.

Quicksilver went home to Mr. Soda's, had a good dinner—of which he stood in need—and sallied forth refreshed to visit once more the old house at Datchet.

He looked all around, but could see nothing of his father.

Taking up a few stones, he cast them at the windows, whistling the while in a peculiar way to imitate a whip-poor-will.

This had often been a signal between his father and himself in the forest.

Presently the door opened and Bill Silver appeared, carrying a lantern.

It was rapidly growing dark, and he could not see anyone, so he whistled again.

"Is that you, Quicksey?" asked he.

"Yes, father. I want to warn you."

"Against what, my lad?"

"It's known in the college that Jack of Eton entered this house and never came out again. The hawks will be down on you before long."

At this communication Bill Silver was very much surprised, but he was greatly pleased also, as there was yet time to arrange everything for an escape.

"You're a good boy," said his father. "Come with me up to London, and I'll promise not to hit you again."

"Can't do it, father. I know you," replied Quicksilver. "You're all very well when you're sober, but when the drink's in you, it makes you forget everything. No. I'll never do you any harm, but I can get my own living without being with you."

Bill Silver made fruitless efforts to persuade his son to change his mind, for

he really felt that he should like to have him with him once more.

The boy cut short any further information by retiring up the road, and climbing up to somebody's pigeon-house, where he hid himself.

A couple of hours elapsed.

Quicksilver fancied he saw shadowy forms flitting about the grounds of the old house—lights flashed at intervals, and it was clear that the inmates were very busy.

About nine o'clock the police arrived in strong force, guided by Owen.

When Quicksilver saw him, he descended from his perch and stopped Owen, saying—

"Here I am."

Owen turned to Mr. Simpson.

"This is the boy Quicksilver, of whom I spoke to you!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I know him," answered Simpson, dryly. "His father is supposed to be one of the forgers. You should not have allowed him to come up here."

"Why not?"

"Don't you recollect what he did in the matter of the cave? He warned his father, and we lost Bill Silver, as we are likely to do to-day."

Owen bit his lips with vexation, for he saw the force of these remarks.

"Boy," continued the police officer, "has anyone left the house since you've been here?"

"Not that I know of, sir," replied Quicksilver.

"Well, we will surround the house, and do our best, though it isn't that youngster's fault if the birds have not flown."

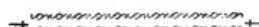
The house was accordingly surrounded by a cordon of police, so as to make escape impossible, and the inspector with half-a-dozen men went to the front door.

Owen and Quicksilver remained in the rear.

A knock at the front door brought no answer.

"Burst it open," cried Simpson.

A vigorous onslaught was at once made upon the lock with a crowbar, but for a while it resisted all attempts to force it.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FIGHT IN THE OLD HOUSE.

THE chief of the police was well acquainted with the desperate nature of the men with whom he had to deal, and had taken every precaution which his long experience as an officer could suggest.

In addition to their truncheons, every man was armed with a revolver, so that if firearms were used by the forgers, shots could be fired in return.

The assault on the door was continued, but it was made of solid oak, and for a time resisted the blows of the sledge-hammers which were used against it.

When the attack began, Ivan, Timor, and Bill Silver were together.

"They're at it," exclaimed Bill, who turned as pale as his red face would permit. "The game is up."

"Yes," replied Ivan; "we will escape by the subterranean passage."

"And lose no time," remarked Timor. "I for one have no wish to fall into the hands of the police."

Bill Silver grinned diabolically as he pointed to the front door.

"They don't know what's in store for them when they do get it open," he said.

Nor did they.

The fiendish ingenuity of Ivan had suggested an idea which only a miscreant like himself would have thought of.

A can of nitro-glycerine, which is a most explosive compound, had been affixed to the lock of the door, in such a way that when it was forced it must go off, with disastrous effect to anyone who happened to be near.

"Run upstairs into the printing-room, my good friend Silver," continued Ivan, "and bring down a bundle of rouble notes I left there. We can get rid of them in London, and I shall want some money."

Silver growled deeply, like an enraged wolf.

"Why didn't you think of that before?" he asked.

"It escaped my memory."

"I've a good mind to tell you to go yourself. We've no time to lose. Hark! how they are knocking at the door."

"We will wait for you in the passage."

Silver reluctantly quitted the room and went upstairs after the roll of notes.

No sooner was he gone than Ivan looked meaningly at Timor.

"Come, let us hurry," he exclaimed, "and leave that fool to his fate. I have had enough of him, and shall be glad of this opportunity of getting rid of him."

"He is no companion for us," replied Timor, "and we have made all the use we can of him."

"You are right."

Hastily they sought a small staircase, which led into the coal-cellars.

Striking a light, Ivan disclosed a door, which he opened with a private key.

This allowed them to enter a passage dug in the clay, which ran under the road, and ended in a field on the other side, the exit being concealed by a clump of alders.

"Enter," cried Ivan, who was cool as ice, and as methodical in all his movements as fate.

His nephew passed into the narrow aperture — he followed, closing and locking the door after him.

They had basely left Bill Silver to his fate.

Threading the passage, they emerged on the other side in the cool night air, and without attracting any attention, crossed the fields in the direction of Slough.

As they went along they could hear the repeated and incessant blows of the sledge-hammers, and the hoarse cries of the police as they incited each other to increased exertions.

Meanwhile, Bill Silver had possessed himself of the notes, and made his way to the door of the underground passage which the forgers had made, with infinite trouble, at the time they first took possession of the house, knowing that it would be an easy means of escaping if they were attacked.

"Halloa, Ivan!" he cried. "What's this, Timor? Where are you?"

A sepulchral echo alone replied to him. "The door's locked! Where are

you?" he continued. "Can't you answer a chap?"

He kicked furiously against the door, which gave out a hollow sound which struck to his heart like the knell of doom.

Then the truth burst upon him in all its unutterable horror.

His cowardly and treacherous companions had abandoned him to his fate!

When this conviction was forced upon him, his knees trembled under him, his jaw dropped, and he turned ghastly pale, his thin lips becoming actually livid; big drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, and his short stubby hair stood on end.

"Gone!" he moaned; "gone—the mean miserable hounds! Left me in 'the lurch—hang them! I might have expected nothing less from the dirty Russians. But I'll sell my life dearly—no penal servitude for me. The police have too much against me. I should go for life this time, and I'd rather die a thousand deaths. I only want to live long enough to give information about Ivan and Timor, which will place them in a fix."

Quitting the cellar, he made his way up the stairs, and entered the sitting-room on the ground floor, locking the door after him.

On the table was a pair of pistols, one of which he grasped in each hand.

"Now, then, come on," he cried to his still invisible foes; "I am ready for you, and Bill Silver will show that he is no coward, and knows how to die."

Scarcely had the words left his lips when the street door gave way with a crash, and a terrible explosion was heard, shaking the house to its foundations.

Then all was quiet and silent as the grave for a few minutes.

Several policemen were injured by the explosion, one being killed outright.

Nothing daunted, however, Simpson, followed by half-a-dozen men, rushed into the house, which they searched from top to bottom, finding nobody.

They then commenced an attack on the sitting-room door.

Silver fired several shots through the woodwork, wounding two men.

The fire was returned.

At length the door gave way, and Silver was seen enveloped in a cloud of

smoke; one arm, which hung useless by his side, was bleeding profusely from a bullet wound; with the other he continued to fire, as if anxious to direct the shots of the police against himself.

Simpson determined to put a stop to this scene of carnage, for his men were falling thick around him.

Taking deliberate aim at the hardened and maddened ruffian, he put a bullet in his lungs and stretched him on the floor.

"Yield!" he cried, snatching the pistol from his hand.

"I'm d—done for!" gasped Silver. "It's — all— up — this — j— journey. Heaven help—"

A rush of blood choked his further utterance and his eyes began to glaze.

The injured men were now seen to, and a doctor sent for.

The affair had been quite a sanguinary encounter, for, between the effects of the explosion and Silver's firing, nearly a dozen men were more or less injured, one being dead.

Simpson took possession of the house, the printing press, the engraved plates, and the notes.

He was deeply chagrined at not capturing anyone else, and ordered a strict search of the surrounding country to be made, but without result.

When the fight was over, Owen Tudor and Quicksilver were admitted to the premises. Owen busied himself in looking for Jack, but Quicksilver searched for his father.

The lamps had been lighted, and he penetrated to the sitting-room, where he saw something covered with a sheet.

"What is that?" he asked of Simpson.

"Nothing for you to look at, my poor boy," replied Simpson; "go away."

"I must see it," Quicksilver continued, having an indefinable presentiment of evil.

Darting forward, he drew aside the sheet before he could be prevented, and the pallid, blood-stained face of his father, distorted by the agony of death, was revealed.

With a loud and bitter cry he threw himself upon the body, and broke out into a despairing wail.

"Father, father, why did you die?" he asked, pathetically.

Badly as Silver had treated his son, the boy was heart-broken at his loss, and

they could not drag him away from the corpse, at whose side he remained all night.

Owen spared no effort to find Jack, but so securely was he hidden that his endeavours all failed.

Baffled, he sought Simpson, who, in a drawer of a bureau, had found a plan of the house, which he was studying.

"I am afraid they have killed my poor friend and buried his body," he remarked.

"Humph!" replied Simpson, "I am not prepared to say that, though the matter is perplexing. Have you been in the two cellars?"

"Two? There's only one."

"Look at this," Simpson said, putting his finger on a spot marked "Cellar No. 1, wine." "If this map is correct, and we have no reason to believe otherwise there are two cellars. Let us go and look."

Accordingly they again made an inspection of the house, and were rewarded by seeing a trap-door.

This was lifted up, and a voice exclaimed from the depth—

"Up aloft! what cheer?"

"Good cheer, my hearty," replied Owen. "That's Jack's voice."

It was Jack, alive and well, though faint from want of food and depressed by the fear of starvation which haunted him.

They soon got him up and related all that had happened, Owen all the time struggling with his emotion at the recovery of his friend, sometimes laughing, at others crying.

"Timor and Ivan were in the house," said Jack; "that I'll swear to."

"It matters very little," answered Simpson, "for I have been called upon by an agent of the Secret Service Department, telling me not to arrest either Ivan or Timor. They have powerful friends in the Foreign Office."

"But is that justice?" asked Jack.

"Of course it is not, but such is the fact."

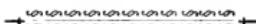
Jack and Owen took leave of Simpson and returned to college, glad that the nest of forgers was broken up.

Mr. Dryasdust was very pleased to see them, and shook his head when he heard of Timor's share in the outrage.

"I shall be sorry if that young man comes back to the house," he remarked; "but if the head master decides upon taking him I can only submit, and I should advise you have as little to do with him as possible."

"You may be sure of that, sir," replied Jack.

The boys retired to bed after supper, tired out with the adventures of the day.



CHAPTER XXIX.

FOUND.

SIMPSON's raid on the forgers made a great sensation throughout the country.

But he said as little as possible about Ivan and Timor.

A fresh order came from the head office in London to hush up the affair, which had caused the Russian government great uneasiness.

He had not forgotten little Effie and the gypsies.

As soon as Bill Silver and the dead policeman were buried, he started out to walk to Gunstock's cottage in the park.

The weather was fine, though a little cold, and the gamekeeper was sitting outside his cottage.

"What news, old man?" asked Simpson.

"It's you who make all the news," replied Gunstock. "I've been reading in the paper all about your raid on the old house in Datchet. The Russian fox was too quick for you."

"Yes. It is a mystery to me how he got away, but he did. Have you seen anything of the gypsies lately?"

"Not later than yesterday," answered Gunstock.

The superintendent's eyes lighted up.

"Where are they?" he demanded.

"I had occasion to go to Ascot Heath," Gunstock said, "and ever since I got shot by that Tartar, Ivan, I've had a keen eye for gypsies. In fact, I hate a gypsy worse than I do a black snake. Well, I saw some tents and took a look round.

Ivan wasn't there, but I saw some familiar faces, notably that of the girl in the scarlet cloak."

"Little Effie?"

"The same."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Simpson. "There's a reward of fifty pounds out for that girl, and as the information came from you I'll give you half of it."

"Keep it yourself. I'm not in want," replied Gunstock.

"Fair is fair," continued Simpson. "Will you guide me to the place?"

"When?"

"Now this minute."

Gunstock seemed to hesitate.

"Are you afraid?" asked Simpson.

"What?" cried the keeper, indignantly. "Me afraid of a gipsy? No, sir; I never saw the gipsy I was afraid of yet."

"Then why don't you come along like a man?"

"Because I have had an order to shoot a couple of fat bucks, which are to be sent up to the venison larder in St. James's Palace. Are you a good shot?"

"None so dusty."

"Take a gun then, and we'll stalk the deer as we walk through the park to Ascot," said Gunstock.

They provided themselves with a couple of breechloaders, powder and shot, and whistling to a deer hound, they started on their walk.

The deer had left the Home Park that day, and were gone into the upper portion of the forest, above the statue at the end of the Long Walk.

When this spot was reached, they turned off at a tangent and made for the Tower, which stands in an isolated position.

Near this spot they encountered a herd of deer.

"There's the slot of a big buck," cried Gunstock, pointing to some hoof-prints in the damp soil.

"Right you are," replied Simpson. "I'll wager a bottle of wine that it is a stag of ten tynes."

"Ten! More likely seventeen. Get to windward, or they'll sent us."

Carefully they stalked the deer, succeeding in getting within shot, when they both selected their quarry and fired.

Two splendid stags fell at their first

shot, and with the second barrels they killed a couple of roe deer.

Gunstock ran up, and severing the necks of the fallen animals, as the rest of the deer scuttled away with the swiftness of the wind, left the bodies where they fell until they returned.

"The venison is all right," said Gunstock. "Now for the heath. What will you do if the gipsies show fight?"

"Fight 'em back," replied Simpson. "I mean having that girl. My professional reputation is at stake on that."

"Who wants her?"

"Her father, Mr. Vavasour, one of the knights at the castle. She was stolen when she was quite a child."

As they walked along he told the keeper all about Effie, and how Jack had found out to whom she belonged.

The distance from Windsor to Ascot was only about six miles, and when they reached the heath, Gunstock led his companion at once to the spot where the gipsies were encamped.

All was bleak and bare.

The scene could not be called picturesque, for it was unrelieved by a single tree.

The heath somewhat resembled the illimitable prairie of the Far West, and the tents of the gipsies might have been taken for the teepess of the Red Indians.

It was growing dark.

Already the shades of night were falling fast, but the fires of the gipsies glared red against the dull leaden sky.

It was their supper time.

Pots were hanging on tripods over the fire, and from them a savoury smell of rabbits, chickens and other good things, stewing with onions.

Flitting round one of these pots was little Effie.

Simpson and Gunstock appeared on the scene abruptly.

The gipsies who were lounging about, smoking and talking, looked at them askance, as if they regarded them as intruders.

"Good evening," exclaimed Simpson.

"What do you want here?" asked Golos, who was the leader of the gipsies since Ivan had gone away. "We are not in the park now."

"Oh, you know me!"

"Yes, I know you for the persecutor of the poor Zingari."

Simpson went up to Effie and touched her on the arm, which made her shrink away from him, as if she apprehended some evil.

"Little girl," he said, "I want you to come with me."

"What for? I have done nothing," she replied with the air of a timid fawn.

"I am the chief of the Windsor police."

"Oh, heaven, a policeman! Golos, I am arrested."

She shrieked this out at the top of her voice, and Golos instantly came to her side, while the other gipsies, male and female, crowded round, some drawing knives and others pistols.

Effie was the darling of the camp.

It was an exciting moment, and the scene, from being common-place, at once became romantic.

Golos was a tall brawny specimen of humanity, who looked as if he could take two men in his arms and crush them.

At the same time Gunstock was over six feet high and could turn the scale at thirteen stone, while Simpson had been in the Life Guards before he became a policeman, so that they were each a match for the Russian.

Yet they were only two to seven, not counting the women, who in fights were able to fire shots as well as the men.

Striding forward like an athlete, Golos exclaimed—

"What for you want this girl?"

"Stand back," cried Simpson, "or by heaven! I'll shoot you through the heart."

Golos retreated a few paces.

He knew the law of the land, and did not want to be hunted down for murder if he could avoid it, still he was very loath to part with Effie.

"Speak," he replied. "I will listen."

"Right. Here," exclaimed Simpson, "I have fifty men. One whistle from me will bring them upon you."

Golos assumed a penitent air at hearing this.

"We have not offended against the law," he replied. "Of what are we accused? Cannot the poor gipsy live in his tent on the barren heath, without being hunted as if he was a wolf?"

"With you I have nothing to do."

"Which member of my tribe has transgressed the law?"

"My business," said Simpson, "is simply with this young lady. Years ago you came from Tartary or Bohemia, or wherever you belong, to England, and you stole this child—at least, she was a child then."

"It is a lie!" cried Golos, angrily. "She is my daughter."

He extended his arms towards Effie.

"Come, my darling," he said, "to one who loves you."

She shrank back from him.

"No! no! I—I have heard something of this before," she exclaimed; "let the gentleman talk."

"My girl," continued Simpson, "you are the daughter of a gentleman living in the castle. Will you come with me to his arms, or will you remain with these Russian gipsies, and be a tramp—a nameless tramp—all your life?"

"They have been kind to me," she replied.

"Kind! Who wouldn't be kind to you, my child? Of course they would be kind to you, but the first duty you owe is to your father. He wants you. These people stole you—they are thieves."

"All gipsies are," cried Gunstock, savagely.

"Hush, my friend," continued Simpson. "We will not abuse them. If they will let the girl go quietly they shall not be molested by me or my men."

Golos drew himself up proudly.

"Some of us," he said, "are Tartars, some are Bohemians, but I would have you know that we have better blood in our veins than anyone in England. What matters it if we do not live in houses? We prefer tents. Are not the children of the woods as good as the dwellers in houses? Let the girl alone, and we will not harm you."

Simpson put his arm round Effie's waist.

"She is my prisoner," he exclaimed. "Touch her who dare."

The gipsies made threatening gestures, but they were afraid to fire, lest they should injure Effie.

"Cover me," continued Simpson. "Shoot the first man who moves."

Gunstock put himself behind the police-officer, who began to retreat, Effie making no effort to escape from her captor.

Golos made a dash towards Gunstock, who presented his breech-loader at his breast.

"Back!" he cried; "one step further and you die."

The gipsy hesitated a little while and then turned to his men.

"To your tents," he said; "it is our fate to lose her."

With bowed head he walked away, and Simpson, with Gunstock, took Effie towards the high road.

"That's all right," remarked Gunstock. "I was fearful we should have a hard time with those fellows."

"My threat about my men in ambush frightened Golos," replied Simpson. "But he has some deep design in view. I saw it in his face."

"How?"

"He was afraid to fight us then, but he will attempt a rescue. Timor is in love with this girl, and the gipsies are keeping her for him. If they let her go, they will dread the vengeance of Ivan, who is Timor's uncle."

"Perhaps you are right; all I know is, I would have rendered a good account of some of them had they fired on us. I had got Golos in my eye. He was as dead as that buck we shot just now."

Simpson felt a heavy weight on his arm.

"Why the girl has fainted," he said. "Never mind, I'll carry her into Ascot, and we can get a conveyance there to Windsor."

He handed his gun to the keeper, and carried little Effie as if she had been a child, until they could get a carriage.

She came to herself when they arrived at the hotel, and as Simpson talked to her she became reconciled to the situation, though she could not help

feeling miserable, for the gipsies were her friends, and although she was going to meet her father, she was going amongst strangers.

Instead of making any resistance, she passively allowed herself to be put in the carriage and driven to Windsor.

"Take me to my father," she sobbed, "and be good to me. I am very helpless. If you are doing me any wrong, heaven forgive you."

They comforted her as best they could, and at last they came to the castle, where they at once took her to Mr. Vavasour's apartments.

The old gentleman was seated in his drawing-room, with his face buried in his hands, thinking of the darling he feared he should never see more.

Simpson went in first, leaving Effie outside with Gunstock.

"Mr. Vavasour," exclaimed he, "don't be agitated. I have news for you."

The old gentleman rose up trembling.

"My darling!" he cried. "Where is she?"

"I have found her."

"Thank heaven!" said Mr. Vavasour, piously lifting his eyes and his hands to heaven. "Bring her in here. I can bear it. I have nerved myself for this day, if it should ever come."

Hearing this, Simpson brought the daughter to the father, and they were soon clasped in a firm embrace.

"My child—my child!" he exclaimed, caressing her fondly.

Gunstock and Simpson withdrew.

Friends of Mr. Vavasour's, hearing the glad tidings, came in.

Effie found herself surrounded by new acquaintances, who vied with each other in being kind to her.

Ere she retired to rest that night she knew the happiness of having a parent to care for her.



CHAPTER XXX.

LOST AGAIN.

ETON was greatly excited.

It was the day of the annual football match between collegians and oppidans, and Jack had the honour of playing on the side of the oppidans.

Owing to his size and skill, he was made side post, or half-back, as some schools call it, and rendered great assistance to his side, carrying everything before him, and kicking a goal, so that

eventually the oppidans won by one goal to nothing.

When the game was over, there were loud cheers for Dashley.

"Hurrah! Three cheers for Dashley. Hip, hip— Halloo!" cried Owen.

He was in the act of throwing his hat in the air, when he stumbled up against somebody, who pushed him away, causing him to utter the latter exclamation.

Looking up, he saw Timor.

"You little disguster!" cried Timor. "Get out of my way."

"What! are you back again?" asked Owen.

"Yes; and you'd better behave yourself."

"I don't like a friend of thieves, gipsies, and forgers," replied Owen.

"Don't you? Perhaps you dislike that equally?"

As he spoke, Timor struck Owen a blow in the face, which caused him to fall up against Hardy, the new boy with the red hair.

Hardy, staggering in his turn, exclaimed loudly—

"Cheese it there."

"I couldn't help it," exclaimed Owen, as he picked himself up.

"You nearly knock the wind out of a fellow, and then say 'you couldn't help it.' Hear me smile. If it wasn't your fault, whose was it?"

"That big Russian brute's," said Owen.

He pointed to Timor, who was standing close by with his hands in his pockets.

"He knocked you against me, eh?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Then I'll have to take it out of him."

"What for?" asked Timor surprised.

"Oh, I don't allow anyone to take liberties with me," said Hardy, shaking his red head. "I'm a peculiar sort of a fellow that way."

"Are you?" Timor replied, with a sneer.

"If you are at all sceptical on the point, you can bet on it, and lose every time."

"I never fight with vegetables."

"What?"

"I can't punch carrots."

"Oh, can't you? It's a pity about

you. But carrots can punch you. Look out for your nut, old fellow."

Saying this, he struck Timor in the eye, knocked off his hat, and caused the proud aggressive Russian to roll up against Spankey, the cake man.

The shock made Spankey roll over.

His tin can full of luxuries, in the shape of pastry, was upset.

To the credit of the boys, be it said, none scrambled for the contents.

Eton boys were too proud to do anything of that sort.

If they wanted tarts, cakes, or buns, they could either pay for them, get credit, or go without.

"Tarts, cakes, and buns," Spankey was in the act of saying.

"Blow your buns!" cried Hardy.

"Pay me for the damage, sir."

"Ask the Russian bear," said Owen.

Timor got up from the recumbent position which the blow had compelled him to occupy, and taking a handful of sovereigns from his pocket, carelessly threw one of them towards him.

"Thank you, sir. You are a gentleman, Mr. Timor, sir," cried Spankey.

He was delighted.

This handsome present had paid him five times over for his "tarts, cakes, and buns."

"Mind it isn't a duffer," said Owen.

"A—excuse me, sir, did I understand you to say a—a duffer?"

"He's in the forgery line."

"Ah, hem! yes; I did hear something about that," replied Spankey. "But, he added, biting the coin, "this is guinea gold. I'll take it."

Timor grew furious, and in spite of his self-possession, his rage was only too apparent as he stalked up to Owen.

"Say that again!" he exclaimed.

"I said it once. Isn't that enough for you?" replied Owen Tudor.

"I'm back again in the house," continued Timor, "and if you chaff me, I'll make your life a misery and a burden to you."

"Will you, indeed?"

Hardy interposed.

"I've got something to say to that," he remarked. "Just get out of here, unless you want to put your arm in a sling."

Timor glared angrily at him and walked away, seeing that he was no

match for Hardy, whose arms were like iron.

At the same time he made a mental note of the occurrence, and was Hardy's sworn enemy from that time forth.

Jack had spied Owen in the crowd of lookers-on.

He came up to him wet with perspiration and covered with mud.

Owen had shouted himself hoarse, backing up Jack and the oppidans.

"Well played, Jack, old boy," cried Owen. "You won the game, dear old fellow."

"Oh, no," said Jack. "I did my little best, that was all."

"But you kicked the only goal. It was one to nothing. The 'tugs,'"—name for the collegians—"got not even a touch. I call it a splendid game."

"You were having a little fun on your own account, weren't you?"

"Nothing much. Timor's back again."

"Never!"

"He is though."

"I'm not surprised. What did he do?"

"Propped me in the eye because I checked him. Hardy, however, settled him, and he did not dare to tackle him."

Jack held out his hand to Hardy.

"Let me thank you for helping my friend," he said.

"Hear me smile," replied Hardy. "I'll do it any time, any day in the week, if I saw a fellow being bullied."

"You'll have your hands full at this school if those are your principles."

"Shall I? They're big enough," answered Hardy, exhibiting his fists, which were red and hard and large, like small mangel wurzels.

"You are a good sort."

"I was always so considered."

The boys in the field were kicking about the ball now the match was over, and the ball, being kicked at random, happened to strike Hardy on the side of the head.

Bang!

It made a hollow noise, as if it had struck the head of a drum.

"By Jove!" cried Hardy. "Somebody planted that beautifully for me."

He picked up the ball and looked around.

Timor was standing a little way off grinning at him in a pleased manner.

"Look at that monkey. I'll bet he did it," continued Hardy.

Dropping the ball, he kicked it in his direction, but though it was well directed it did not strike the person it was intended for.

Mr. Benjamin Soda was passing by, he having been to see the match, and the football caught him full in the face.

"Knocked him off his pins," cried Owen, delightedly.

Jack clapped his hands.

"Bravo! Well stopped, sir. B. and S. can do it," he exclaimed.

Mr. Soda lost his hat and his footing at the same time.

He spun about like a teetotum, then he fell prone on the ground and groaned dismally.

"Mercury! Mercury!" he exclaimed loudly.

Jack ran forward and picked up the professor, whose face was covered with mud.

Owen gave him his hat, and the boys sympathised generally with him.

"Hope you are not hurt, sir," he exclaimed.

"Slightly confused, that's all. Where's the boy Mercury?" asked Mr. Soda.

"Who's he?"

"Quicksilver. Mercury is quicksilver, and we have changed his name. That boy's been awful since his father was shot."

"In what way?"

"I've cut all the trees down in my garden, and since then he's always sitting up on a clothes prop. You can't keep him on solid ground."

"Mercury on a clothes prop! That would be a new idea for a sculptor," suggested Owen.

Mr. Soda wiped his face and felt better, but he occasionally shook his head as if he wasn't sure it was quite safe on his shoulders.

"Have you heard the news?" he inquired.

"Not a word," replied Jack.

"Mr. Vavasour has got back his daughter."

"Little Effie?" said Jack.

"Yes. I heard it in Windsor this morning."

Jack made a bound in the air.

"Bravo!" he said. "That just counter-

balances the bad news. I've been told that Timor's come back to the school. That I don't like; but I'll cut up to Windsor this afternoon and see my darling."

His face reflected the feeling of his heart, which throbbed with pleasure when he thought of Effie, and seeing her happy in the position to which she belonged.

There was no place in the field of an elevated kind where Quicksilver could climb up, and he had as usual been miserable on his feet.

At the conclusion of the match, he felt like jumping up somewhere.

Funnybird Minor, who was very tall and thin, passed between him and Owen Tudor. Knowing that, with his long legs, he could run faster than Owen, he determined to chaff him.

"Ma—a—a!" he exclaimed.

"That's Funnybird," cried Owen. "I'll give him what for."

"Ma—a—a! You Welsh goat! Ma—a—a—!"

At this moment Quicksilver jumped on his back and put his arms round him.

Just at the same time Owen started to run after Funnybird and lick him if he could catch him.

With Quicksilver on his back, Funnybird Minor was heavily handicapped.

It was, in racecourse parlance, "carrying weight for age."

"Hold on, old fellow," cried Owen. "I'll warn you."

Running after him, he succeeded in catching up with him, when he began to kick him.

Away ran Funnybird amidst the laughter of the boys; kick followed kick until at last he laid down on the grass, rolling over and over.

Quicksilver extricated himself, although in the confusion he received more than one of the kicks, which he had not bargained for.

"You little wretch," cried Funnybird, shaking his fist at him. "You'll jump on my back again, will you?"

"I saved you a few kicks," replied Quicksilver.

"If it hadn't been for you I should not have had any at all."

He rubbed his trousers as if it were a pleasure, but when Owen Tudor made a

movement towards him he started off at his best pace.

"That settles him," said Jack. "By Jove, this is becoming quite a fighting school."

"Boys will be boys," observed Mr. Soda.

"They can't very well be girls, sir."

"Humph, that is an axiom which I cannot dispute. What are the words of the poet?—" Oh, once in childhood's hour I sat within a happy bower. All my books neglected were, as I thought upon the fickle fair."

Jack and Quicksilver went off together, walking up by the banks of the brook called Chalvey, towards the gasworks.

"Well, Quicksey," exclaimed Jack, "I haven't seen you since the affair at the old house."

"Don't talk about it, Master Jack," replied Quicksilver, the tears starting to his eyes.

"I will not, my poor fellow. I only mentioned it because I wanted to thank you for the share you had in getting me out of the cellar, when Timor intended I should die. You lost a father, but you have always a friend in me. As Mr. Soda, old S. and B., your master, would say, what are the words of the poet?—"

"Alas, there's a time when dejection
Would reap the wild words of despair."

"I've got no one but you now, sir," replied Quicksilver. "Dad wasn't much, but a father's a father after all."

Jack thought that Bill Silver was better dead than in gaol, but he did not say so, for he was fearful of hurting the boy's feelings.

They parted at the gasworks, Jack promising to see him soon at Mr. Soda's, and Quicksilver immediately climbed up to the top of the gas-house, as if to relieve his overladen heart.

When Jack returned to the house he had just time enough to change his jersey and have his bath, when the dinner-bell rang.

Timor sat down at the table without moving a muscle of his face.

Everybody stared at him, and this attention he seemed to take as a compliment.

The general opinion was that the house was going to the dogs, for several things had leaked out about his connection with the gipsies, and many of

the boys did not think him a fit companion for them.

Funnybird Major, however, received him with open arms; they messed together again, and in a few days the boys ceased to talk about him.

In the afternoon Jack, having an hour to spare, ran up the town to visit Mr. Vavasour, whom he found walking on the terrace of the castle with his daughter.

That she was his daughter he was perfectly satisfied, because he had found on her the birthmark by which he could always know her.

Directly she saw Jack she ran up and threw her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Jack of Eton!" she cried.

"My dear little Effie," he replied. "May I have a kiss?"

"As many as you like," she said, presenting her rosy cheek.

He kissed her affectionately, and then he shook hands with her father.

"I must congratulate you," said Jack, "at having recovered your daughter, sir."

"And I think," answered Mr. Vavasour, "that I may congratulate you on having found a sweetheart, eh?"

"Yes, I think Effie cares for me as much as I know I care for her. Do you miss your old friends, the gipsies?"

"They were very kind to me," replied Effie. "I have lived with them all my life, and I cannot help missing them, though I am very glad to be with papa. All this life is new to me. I do not know myself yet. After being a gipsy girl it is hard to be a lady."

She laughed lightly.

"I feel," she added, "that I want to go into the kitchen and cook things. If I walk in the park and see a rabbit, I want to throw a stick at it, but papa says I must learn French and music and be a lady."

"You can sing, Effie?"

"Oh, yes, the gipsies have taught me that. Many a night in England, Bohemia, Spain, Russia, wherever I have been, we have sang while Ivan played on the guitar."

"Ivan has gone away," said Jack.

"Yes, I heard that; but he is pardoned by the Tsar, and can go back to Russia."

"Indeed! Do you know where Timor is?"

"I do not. Timor I am afraid of. I hate Timor. He is merciless and cruel. Ivan is much better than he."

"Timor is back again at Eton," Jack replied.

Effie shivered as if in fear.

"Then there is no safety for me, for Timor has sworn that I shall be his wife."

Jack flushed angrily.

"Never while I live," he said.

"Oh, but he is a dreadful young man; he has powerful friends and does not care what he does. Papa, let us go away from here."

"Why, my dear?"

"Because Timor is at Eton."

"He cannot harm my child," said Mr. Vavasour, putting his arm round her in a reassuring manner.

"But he will try."

"Let him. I am your father and he dare not touch you."

Mr. Vavasour spoke confidently, yet his words had not the effect of reassuring Effie, who was in great dread of Timor.

Jack had to get back to college for five o'clock school, and he could not stay long, so he promised to come after twelve the next day and take her for a walk.

They kissed each other at parting.

"Good-bye, Jack of Eton," said Effie. "Beware of Timor."

"I will," he answered. "All the harm he can do me will not amount to much."

Effie shook her head as if she did not quite believe this, and Jack hurried away, thinking that she looked more lovely than he had ever seen her before.

His heart was completely gone.

When he reached the school yard he met Bill Bragg, who had a letter in his hand.

"I say, Dashley, here's a queer start!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"You know I was at a private school before I came here?"

"So you informed me once before. Are you proud of the distinction?"

"Oh, hang it, no. I like a public school best, and Eton is the best of all of them. But I was at Milton College, where that strange fellow Hardy came from."

"You mean William Rufus?"

"Call him carrots or what you like; I'm alluding to the man with the red hair. He's slap-bang and all alive, for he takes his own part," said Bragg. "But I can't forgive him that prop he gave me in the eye."

"Why not?"

"Oh, it's not me to forget a favour of that kind. If I can't hit back in the daylight I'll kick in the dark."

"Well?"

"I heard him say he'd been at Milton, so I wrote to some of the old boys there and inquired about a chap called Hardy. Here is an answer, Hardy was expelled from the school for theft."

"Nonsense."

"It's a fact. Read the letter which is written by one of the monitors. All straight—fact. Slap-bang, and all alive."

Jack was greatly disgusted.

He had begun to like Hardy for his independence and pluck; but when he heard that a boy named Hardy had been sent away from Milton for stealing, he could not help thinking that another black sheep had crept into the flock.

"By Jove!" he remarked, "this is too bad. My tutor takes in anybody."

"But perhaps he did not know."

"He ought to inquire. Our house will get a bad name. How about Timor?"

"Oh, he's a walking mystery. He does all sorts of funny things, and yet all the upper boys are thick with him again; but I say, Jack, talking about thieves, I missed a set of gold studs this morning."

"Did you really?"

"Slap-bang, and all alive. They were given me by the Sultan of Turkey when he was over here."

"Draw it mild."

"Fact, I assure you. Wouldn't have lost them for anything."

The masters now came into school, and the conversation between the boys was interrupted, as they belonged to different divisions, and had to go in different directions.

Any little matter of scandal soon gets about in a school.

Bragg told half-a-dozen intimate friends about the letter he had received respecting Hardy, and that evening it was currently reported that he was a

thief, that he had forged his father's name, and that he had killed another boy at his last school, and buried him in the playground.

Hardy wondered why he was stared at and treated coldly by those he had regarded as his friends.

He could not understand the change of treatment, but he asked no questions, keeping himself to himself and doing his work.

Timor however heard the damaging rumour, and purposely pushed up against him in the passage.

"What did you do that for?" asked Hardy, his eyes glancing.

"Keep your own side," answered Timor, "and don't push me."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't choose to be jostled by a thief."

There were several boys standing about, and they all crowded around to see the fun.

"If report speaks truly, you are no better than you should be," replied Hardy.

"No one can prove anything against me," said Timor. "Dashley has told a pack of lies about me, but no one believes him. As for you, it is well known that you left your last school for stealing."

"Prove it," cried Hardy.

Timor beckoned to Bill Bragg, who was standing in the crowd.

"Come here," he said. "I have called this fellow what he is. Speak to him."

"Do you know Prior?" asked Bragg.

"Certainly; he is senior monitor at Milton," replied Hardy.

"Read this letter."

Hardy took the tell-tale letter, and read it carefully,

Then he handed it back, with a deep sigh; all his animation was gone.

"What have you to say to that?" demanded Timor, triumphantly.

"Nothing," replied Hardy.

The boys looked astonished, for they had at least expected an indignant denial.

"You admit the charge?"

"I say nothing, except that Prior is mistaken. I am innocent. Place what construction you like on the letter."

"Why did you leave the school?"

"I had my reasons."

An angry murmur rose from the boys, and cries of "thief, thief!" arose, which only stopped when Jack and Owen came out of their rooms.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"This fellow is not a fit companion for gentlemen," replied Timor, whose impudence knew no bounds.

"This from you," cried Jack. "You vile Russian scoundrel, get into your room, or I'll knock some of the cheek out of you. It's a pretty thing indeed when you begin to talk about gentlemen."

"I will explain all to Dashley," said Hardy, "and if he is satisfied with my explanation, I hope you all will be, though what I say to him must be kept a secret."

The boys assented to this, as they had full faith in Jack.

Timor and Bill Bragg were the only exceptions, and they hissed loudly as Jack and Hardy retired into the former's room.

The boys waited outside in the passage while Jack Dashley and Hardy were shut in the room together.

What transpired between the two they could not tell.

The consultation was not a lengthy one.

Nevertheless Timor took advantage of the opportunity to say something spiteful to the boys about Hardy, whom he hated almost as much as he did Dashley.

"I say, you fellows," he exclaimed, "Hardy's a pet of Dashley's, and he'll stuff us up with a pack of nonsense."

"That's what I think," said Bragg.

"Here's Bragg of my way of thinking."

"Entirely."

"There's no nonsense about Bragg."

"Not much," replied that individual, feeling himself highly honoured. "I'm straight forward. Slap-bang, and all alive."

"Bragg's a good fellow," continued Timor, who wished to make a friend of him.

"That's me to a T."

"I don't want to flatter him, but I have always found him genuine."

"You do your humble servant proud," said Bragg. "The same compliment was paid me by the lord mayor last time

he dined with my father. He remarked —'That's a fine lad of yours Mr. Bragg. He's made of sterling metal, and will shine in the world.'

"Did he?"

"Fact, I assure you. Slap-bang, and all alive."

"That lord mayor must have been a man of discernment," rejoined Timor. "Now, what I say, boys, is this. Bragg has heard from the school where Hardy was, and we are told that he was expelled for theft."

"Yes, yes," chorussed the boys.

"If so he is no companion for us."

"Timor's right."

"We ought to send him to Coventry, and I vote we do."

"Agreed."

"Dashley is as bad as he if he takes his part."

There was a general assent to this proposition, and Timor would have made further remarks had not the door opened and the two boys appeared.

Hardy was looking very pale, but Jack, on the contrary, seemed quite pleased.

"What is the result of your deliberations may I ask?" exclaimed Timor.

"It's all right," replied Jack.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Hardy has explained everything to my entire satisfaction. He is an honourable man, and content at present to remain under a cloud."

Timor laughed contemptuously.

His sneer found an echo amongst the boys, who were at that moment inclined to follow his leadership.

"That's all very well for you," said Timor; "but it won't do for us."

"I give you my word," answered Jack.

"I won't take it."

"What, do you dare to insult me?"

"I simply say what I mean and mean what I say. All the boys are with me."

Jack looked angrily at Timor, but did not know what to do under the circumstances, which were very embarrassing.

He turned his eyes upon Hardy.

"I think you ought to say something," he observed.

"With pleasure," replied Hardy.

"Well," cried Timor, roughly, "let us hear what you have got to say."

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"JACK POUNCED ON HIM AND BROUGHT HIM TO THE GROUND."



"Dashley has been told everything, but I have bound him to secrecy."

"Why?"

"I am not at liberty to speak at present."

A smile of incredulity came upon every face on hearing this declaration.

"That's too thin," said Timor.

"Eh?"

"It won't wash. You will be sent to Coventry, and the best thing you can do is to write home and ask your people to take you away from the school."

"I don't see it."

"You are not a fit associate for us."

"How about yourself?" asked Jack.

"I am a Russian nobleman," Timor replied, "and infinitely superior to such trash as you. But let that pass. I can take my place by the side of the tsar of the greatest country in the world."

"Bother you and your tsar. I want to do justice to a cruelly abused and calumniated fellow."

"Then all I can tell you is that we won't associate with Hardy. Isn't that so, boys?" said Timor.

"It is, it is!" was the general answer.

Jack looked at Owen Tudor and Bragg.

"Are you too against Hardy?" he asked.

"Well," replied Owen, "things look very black against him. Why don't he speak out?"

"He can't."

"It would be better for him."

"Owen, you are my chum, and you ought to take my word," said Jack, reproachfully.

"So I do, dear boy, but—"

"Oh, hang your 'buts!'"

"I've nothing more to say," replied Owen. "Be Hardy's champion if you like. I say I won't."

"Why is that?"

"Because Bragg says he has lost a set of studs. I have missed a half-sovereign out of my bureau, and suspicion naturally points to Hardy after the character we have received of him from his last school."

This remark was received with general approbation.

"Send him to Coventry," cried half-a-dozen voices.

This meant that no one would speak

to him, and it was a severe punishment among boys.

"All right," said Hardy, "I can put up with it. You will find out your mistake some day and be sorry for it."

"We are Eton boys, and do not want to be disgraced," replied Timor, imperiously.

"Well, I like that," laughed Jack.

"Perhaps you will like a punch on the head when I give it you."

"When you do."

Timor was afraid of Jack, and although he wanted to keep up his reputation with the other boys, he wanted to avoid a fight if possible.

"We will talk about that to-morrow," he said.

"You Russian bully! all you can do is to boast," cried Jack. "You know I'd lick you within an inch of your life if you began with me."

Hardy interposed mildly.

"Please don't fight on my account," he said. "I am content to suffer because I am innocent."

"I know you are," replied Jack.

"Well, look here," exclaimed Timor, "I have a proposition to make."

"Out with it," replied Hardy.

"Have you got any money or jewellery in your bureau?"

"No, I have not."

"Will you object to our searching your room?"

Hardy shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not a pleasant thing to have done," he rejoined; "but if you wish to play the part of a Russian spy, you are at liberty to search. The result will satisfy you, I hope."

"By Jove! I hope it will," replied Timor, with a malignant flash in his eyes.

Saying this, Timor led the way to Hardy's room, where the lamp was burning on the table, and Hardy handed him the keys of his bureau.

When it was unlocked and opened, Timor drew out a drawer, in which was a set of gold studs and half-a-sovereign.

"Holloa!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"Look for yourself. I think this is rather conclusive evidence of this man being the thief I alleged him to be."

Hardy became as white as a sheet, and leant against a chair for support.

"It's a foul slander!" he said.

"Rubbish! Haven't I found the things in your bureau?"

"I am the victim of a base conspiracy, and I believe you are at the bottom of it."

"You mean to say you did not steal the things."

"I do, most emphatically and distinctly."

"You didn't do it at your last school, eh?"

"No, you Russian liar!" retorted Hardy. "I'm a new boy here, and I happened to offend you, that's why you persecute me."

Jack pressed his way to the front.

"It seems to me very odd," he remarked, "that you should propose to search the room, and directly put your hand upon the drawer in which the things were."

"What do you mean to insinuate?" Timor asked.

"Just this. You stole them yourself, and put them there to injure Hardy, whom we all know you dislike."

"Absurd! You cannot get your pal off in that way," sneered Timor. "Boys, what do you think?"

"He's guilty!" replied several.

"Those are my studs, I'll swear, slap-bang, and all alive. Fork them out!" said Bill Bragg.

They were handed to him, and he looked at them affectionately.

"I'm glad to get them back," he remarked, "because they were a present from the Queen to my father."

"Get out with your humbug!" said Timor.

"My father met the Queen down in Scotland—they were both driving. The roadway narrowed, and her most gracious Majesty said—'Pull on one side, please.'"

"How about the studs?"

"Well, my father asked the Queen to be my godmother. She was full of engagements at the time, and couldn't do it, so she sent the studs as a mark of respect, and I have valued them since because of the honour Her Majesty did the family."

"Oh, my! Can't you tell crammers?" laughed Timor.

"I'm insulted, and by a Russian bear, too," replied Bragg. "It's a hard world to live in. I'm the most truthful man

that ever lived, and yet I can't get fellows to believe my yarns."

Hardy waved his hand.

"My room is my own, and I'll thank all you fellows to clear out," he exclaimed.

"That's right," said Jack, "and if they don't go jolly quick, I'll help you to get them out. I think we can floor a few of them."

There was a rush towards the door.

At this moment, the boys' maid who attended on the boys in that passage appeared.

"Good gracious me, what's the matter?" she asked.

"Timor says that I have stolen some studs, and some money which have been found in my bureau, but which I never put there," replied Hardy.

"It's a curious thing," said the woman, "but I saw Mr. Timor in your room this morning, after twelve o'clock school."

"Did you, indeed!"

"Yes; he was unlocking your bureau with a key, and I thought you had sent him for a book, or lent him one."

Hardy looked at the boys.

"What do you think now?" he exclaimed, "Susan wouldn't tell an untruth."

The boys made no answer, for they were puzzled sorely.

"No, sir, that I wouldn't!" cried Susan, indignantly. "I'm a respectable woman, with a ten years' character in this one place. It's a fact that I saw Mr. Timor at your bureau, and I'll swear to it in a court of justice, if need be."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Timor, with an affected laugh. "You've been bribed to say this."

"I haven't. It's false."

"And I deny that I was in the room at all. It's all trumped-up rubbish. My word is as good as Susan's, and I leave the boys to think what they like."

Saying this, Timor walked off nonchalantly with his hands in his pockets, and the boys formed themselves into two divisions, the Timorites and the Hardymites, being about equally divided.

It was an unpleasant affair, which kept them busy discussing it until supper.

A number of the Timorites carefully sent Hardy to Coventry, and would not speak to him.

Owen Tudor, Jack, and Hardy were all in the latter's room when the bell rang for supper.

"I don't want any," remarked Hardy. "I feel too much worried to eat."

"Your innocence will be proved some day," replied Jack, encouragingly.

"It's hard to bear though all the same."

Bill Bragg and Funnybird Minor passed the door and looked in.

"Come inside," exclaimed Jack.

"Thank you, no."

"Why not?"

"I don't like the company you keep," said Bragg, looking askance at Hardy.

"Capital," cried Funnybird.

"What do you want to shove your oar in for?" asked Jack.

"One's a beastly cad who bags money and things, while the other's a Welsh goat. Ba—a! ba—a!"

Both Owen and Hardy made a rush for him, but Funnybird Minor had long legs and knew how to use them.

The progress of the pursuers was impeded by Bill Bragg's form, against which Hardy cannoned, sending him sprawling.

"Here, I say, turn it up," cried Bragg. "I'm not a human football."

"Bog pardon. It was an accident."

"Oh, well, if you apologise, I won't say anything more. Slap-bang, and all alive, you know," said Bragg, rubbing his arm.

Owen Tudor succeeded in catching Funnybird at the top of the stairs, whereupon dismal yells were immediately heard, showing that he was getting a licking.

"Leave off, you big bully," observed Funnybird.

"What did you call me a goat for?"

"So you are. Ma—a—a—oh! my

shin. You are a Welsh brute to shin a fellow."

"I'll goat you!"

At length Funnybird wriggled himself away, and went half crying down to supper, vowing he would tell his brother.

The next day Jack Dashley had a "saying lesson," as repetition is called at Eton.

It was sixty lines of Homer; he was put on early, got through it all right, and strolled into the school-yard.

He was surprised to see Mr. Vavasour standing near the fives court under the chapel walls, and looking very disconsolate.

"Oh, Dashley," cried Mr. Vavasour in a voice which was weak and tremulous, "I was seeking you."

"Indeed, sir."

"I have been to your tutor's, and not finding you there, I thought I would wait until you came out of school."

"Is anything wrong?" asked Jack, who felt his heart go pit-a-pat.

"Something is very wrong."

"What? Don't keep me in suspense."

"You must try and bear it," answered Mr. Vavasour. "Our little Effie is lost again."

"Gone?" gasped Jack.

"Yes."

"Whither?"

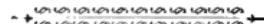
"No one knows."

Jack sat down on the cold steps of the fives court, and hung his head down as if in the most acute distress.

"Excuse me," he said. "This is, in the language of the P. R., a regular body blow; you have knocked me off my centre. I feel anyhow."

Mr. Vavasour regarded him with compassion, for he knew how fond Jack was of his little daughter Effie.

For a brief space neither of them spoke.



CHAPTER XXXI.

HARDY'S SECRET.

AFTER a time Jack recovered from the shock which the announcement had caused him.

"Tell me all, please, sir," he said. "I will, my dear young friend; but

believe me, this blow is as severe for me as for you," replied Mr. Vavasour.

"That I am sure of, but you know that I loved her as a sister, and hoped, when I grew up, that she might and

would be something dearer to me. She was my little sweetheart, and if the Russians have got hold of her we may never see her again."

"I must tell you that we were walking in Windsor Park yesterday afternoon, and I, feeling tired, went into Gunstock's cottage to sit down and rest myself."

"Yes?"

"Effie was gathering ferns, and promised to join me in a few minutes. Gunstock was not at home. All at once I heard a shriek and rushed out, only to behold Effie in the arms of a man who carried her swiftly away. Old and feeble as I am, I could not overtake them; and even had I done so I should have been no match for the ruffian who had captured her."

"What was the result?"

"She disappeared from my gaze. I fell forward in a fit. When I recovered, all trace of her was lost. I returned to the castle, and have had the doctor with me all night. He's forbade me going out, but I could not rest until I had seen you; so here I am. And now what is best to be done? My poor head is in a whirl. I can think of nothing."

Jack was as much perplexed as Mr. Vavasour.

"Have you seen Simpson?" he inquired.

"I sent a message to the chief of the police as soon as I got home last night; but I heard this morning from him that the gipsies had left Ascot Heath, and no one knew in what direction they had travelled."

"What was the man like who stole Effie?"

"I did not see his face, but he was strong and tall."

"It is the gipsy king," said Jack. "By Jove! it is a bad job. I can't see my way clear at all."

Suddenly Mr. Vavasour staggered, and, pressing his hand to his heart, leant against the wall, his face becoming pale as death.

Jack was alarmed,

"Are you ill, sir?" he asked in great concern.

"A passing faintness," was the reply. "I shall be better presently."

Jack saw one of the college doctors going towards the cloisters, and thought it would be a good thing to call him.

"There is Doctor Ellison," he said.

"I do not want him."

"Perhaps I'd better give him a hail."

Jack determined to act on his own responsibility, for he did not like the look of the old gentleman at all.

He ran across the school-yard and overtook the doctor in the cloisters near the pump.

"Please, sir, stop a moment!" he exclaimed.

"Ah, Dashley, how do you do?" answered the doctor.

He had attended Jack in the sanatorium, and remembered him very well.

"Do you know Mr. Vavasour, sir?" asked Jack.

"Perfectly well. I am his physician. What's the matter with him?"

"He is in the school-yard, and looks so bad he frightens me."

"How is that?"

"His little daughter was stolen by a gipsy last night, and he's all broken up. Will you come and see him?"

"Certainly. I was going to see one of the Fellows, Mr. Dupuy, and after that one of the tugs, as you oppidans call them, who is laid up with bronchitis, in Long Chamber, but I'll let them wait."

"Thank you, sir."

Dr. Ellison accompanied Jack to the fives court, and asked Mr. Vavasour to let him feel his pulse, which he did."

While he was asking a few questions, Owen Tudor came up, holding a yellow envelope in his hand, marked "Immediate."

"A telegram for you, Jack," he said.

"For me? Nothing wrong at home, I hope," rejoined Jack.

"I got through my saying lesson, and went into the passage to look at the letters. Seeing this, I thought I would bring it to you, as it might be important."

Jack hastily tore open the envelope, and read—

"Lord Warden Hotel, Dover.

"From Effie to Dashley,

"Eton College.

8 o'clock.

"DEAR JACK OF ETON,—Ivan has carried me off. We are going to Russia. He says I am to be Timor's wife. You will find me at St. Petersburg. Do come, if you do not want me to die. Ivan is asleep. We are waiting for the

boat. I have bribed a servant to send this. Ivan's valet is watching me. Heaven bless you, dear Jack of Eton.

"Ever your loving
"EFFIE."

"Hang that fellow Ivan!" cried Jack, angrily.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Vavasour, faintly.

Jack handed him the telegram, which he read with difficulty.

"The villain! My child is lost to me for ever!" he ejaculated, spasmodically.

"I hope not, sir."

Mr. Vavasour placed his hand to his heart again, as he had done a few minutes before, breathed with difficulty, and fell back, with glazed eyes, and a rattle in his throat.

"Good heaven! this is dreadful," said Dr. Ellison.

"Is he bad?" inquired Jack.

"He is dying, that's all. It's a case of *angina pectoris*. Bless me, who would have expected this?"

Jack clinched his fists.

"The Russian scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "That's one more to the score I owe them."

He hoped some day to be able to pay off this score.

At present the contingency was very remote, for he could do nothing to Timor, though no doubt the latter was well aware of what his uncle Ivan intended to do.

There was sure to be an understanding between them.

In a few minutes all was over.

Mr. Vavasour breathed his last, and was stretched out a corpse, greatly to the pain of all those who knew him.

Dr. Ellison had the body carried up the steps to the side door of the chapel, and placed inside, until he could give orders for its removal.

Jack and Owen Tudor returned to their tutor's to breakfast, talking in whispers, and as much frightened as they well could be.

In the evening they had to go with the rest of the fourth form to the pupil room to construe a certain lesson, so that they should be perfect when they went into school in the morning.

Jack, Tudor, Bragg, and Funnybird, together with Hardy, were among the others, occupying themselves in trans-

lating the pure Latin of Virgil into indifferent schoolboy English, being assisted by their tutor, Mr. Dryasdust, in the better understanding of the same.

While this was going on a peculiar scratching was heard at the window.

It was repeated several times.

"Dear me! what on earth is that irritating sound?" exclaimed Mr. Dryasdust.

"Dashley's monkey, sir," replied Funnybird Minor.

"I was not aware that he had one, and I shall certainly not allow him to keep one."

"Please, sir, it's a story," cried Jack.

"Is it?" said Funnybird. "You've got a boy always after you as much like a monkey as he can be."

"Who is that?"

"The fellow you call Quicksilver."

"Why, that's Mr. Soda's page. You know Mr. Benjamin Soda, sir."

"Most decidedly I do. Stop, your quarrelling, you two. Bless me, there is that peculiar sound again. What can it be?" exclaimed Mr. Dryasdust.

He looked anxiously towards the window.

"Shall I go out in the garden and see?" asked Jack.

"Lift up the corner of the blind and peep first. It cannot be a cat."

"Perhaps it's a lost dog."

"He couldn't get on the windowsill."

"Maybe it's a ghost."

These and other remarks emanated from the boys, while Jack went to the window, and, lifting up the edge of the blind, peered into the comparative darkness without.

Everyone was intensely interested, and wonder was excited to the highest pitch.

It was a little mild excitement for the boys, more especially as they were construing.

The crescent moon had just risen and was casting its silvery gleam on shrub and tree. Jack saw a human form run away from the window and hide behind a tree hard by.

"It's alive, sir," he cried.

"What?"

"I saw it move."

"But what is it, you stupid boy?" demanded Mr. Dryasdust; "quadruped, biped, or winged creature?"

"It's a good-sized boy, or I'm mistaken."

"In my garden."

"Yes, sir."

"What can he wan't there? It's my opinion that he's after no good at this time of night. Who will volunteer to catch him?"

"I," replied Jack.

"And I, too," replied Owen Tudor.

"Go out at the side door, and be careful you come to no harm," said Mr. Dryasdust.

The two chums immediately passed through the pupil-room into the library, when the private door was opened, and shooting back the bolt, rushed into the garden.

"Which way?" asked Owen.

"Follow me," replied Jack.

He made straight for the tree behind which he had seen the mysterious intruder ensconce himself.

All at once someone darted out, commencing to run.

"Chivvey him!" cried Jack. "Tally-ho! off we go! stole away! Yoicks!"

It was as good as a foxhunt.

In spite of all his efforts to escape, the fellow, who was about five feet in height, and presumably sixteen or seventeen years of age, was run down in fifty yards.

Jack pounced on him, as the eagle on to the lamb, and dealing him a blow under the ear, brought him to the ground.

"Don't hurt me, please," said the young man.

"Who are you?"

"A poor devil who's got no home."

"What do you want in our garden?"

"Only to see someone living in your house," was the reply in the mildest of tones.

Evidently he was not of the dangerous class of burglar.

"I looked in at the window," he continued, "and scratched, thinking he would come out."

"It's one of the boys, then, you wish to see?" inquired Jack.

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"I mustn't tell. Please let me go. I shall see him to-morrow. The fact is, I shouldn't have come to-night if I hadn't been so hungry, and—and— It's all a secret."

"Perhaps I understand it," said Jack. "Let me whisper to you."

He put his head close to the young man's ear, and whispered something to him in a low tone which Owen Tudor could not hear.

"Am I right?" he said aloud.

"Yes, yes," was the rejoinder.

"You can go."

"Oh, thank you."

"I was going to take you inside. Cut along. Make haste; I see lights coming."

It was true.

Mr. Dryasdust had taken a lamp in his hand, and, followed by the remainder of the class, had sallied forth into the garden, accompanied by them as by a body guard.

"Run, ran!" exclaimed Jack, kindly.

Owen Tudor looked on in surprise, but he did not like to interfere, because he knew that his chum must have a good and sufficient reason for letting the boy depart.

The latter seemed very weak and ill.

He was poorly dressed, what clothes he had being in rags, and he appeared more an object of charity than one to be selected for punishment.

"I—I don't think I can run," stammered the poor boy.

"They'll catch you if you don't."

"My head is going round. I've had n—nothing to eat, I am sorry to say, for the last twenty-four hours, and that punch on the head you gave me seems to have knocked me silly."

"That's a pity. What are we to do?" said Jack.

"Let me take my chance."

There was nothing else for it, as Mr. Dryasdust came up, lamp in hand, and seized him by the collar.

"You vagabond!" he exclaimed. "Don't be vicious, don't attempt to bite or kick. It will be the worse for you."

"I shan't do either, sir," was the reply.

"Come into the house quietly. I will examine you."

The intruder suffered himself to be led along quietly enough, and Mr. Dryasdust flattered himself he had made an important and gallant capture, which would greatly redound to his credit as a man and a master.

Pushing him into the pupil-room, in the full glare of the gas, he said—

"Stand there."

Hardy was sitting in the shadow at the far end of the room, but it seemed as if a flash of recognition passed between the newcomer and himself.

"Now, then, give an account of yourself," continued Mr. Dryasdust.

The boy sank on a form, and covering his face with his hands, burst into tears.

"I wish I was dead, I do," he sobbed.

Mr. Dryasdust looked at him in a curious manner.

"Really this is very extraordinary," he remarked. "I cannot make him out. There doesn't seem to be any vice about him."

Hardy rose and stepped forward, pale as a statue.

"Allow me to explain the mystery, sir," he said, "since fate has willed that it must be so."

"You, Hardy?"

"Yes, sir. This is my elder brother."

At this declaration everyone in the room was greatly astonished, because it was so totally unexpected.

"I have been much misunderstood," added Hardy, "since I have been in this house. It has been said that I was a thief, that I was expelled from Milton School. It is not my wish to publish my unfortunate brother's disgrace, but I was never at Milton. This is the first school I have been to. It was my brother William who was sent away for taking another boy's money. Being miserable at home he ran away, intending to go to sea. His funds could not take him further than Windsor, where he has, for a week or two past, been subsisting on what little money I could give him. He must have come here to-night to try and see me, as I have not given him anything for two days."

William Hardy, the outcast, the tramp, looked up, his eyes filled with tears.

"It's all true," he said.

Mr. Dryasdust was much affected at this revelation.

Several of the boys crowded round Hardy and shook him by the hand,

apologising for ever having suspected him.

"Misguided boy," exclaimed the master, "why did you leave your kind friends?"

"Father and mother were always reproaching me, and I couldn't stand it. My brother has behaved like a brick to me; I will say that. He gave me his clothes to pledge to buy food."

"Very sad."

"Don't send me from your door to-night, sir," pleaded William Hardy. "I am very ill—indeed I am. To-morrow I will see if my father will have me back; and if they will send me to sea I'll make a fresh start."

"Really, I don't know what to do. By your own confession you are not a fit companion for my boys."

"I'm so friendless, sir."

"Well, my butler shall take you up town and have you provided for at my expense; and meanwhile I will communicate with your parents, who I dare-say are not so hard-hearted as you seem to imagine," responded Mr. Dryasdust.

He rang the bell, and gave instructions to his servant, who took William Hardy away after he had shaken hands with his brother.

"See that he has plenty to eat out of my own larder," added Mr. Dryasdust.

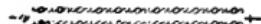
"Yes, sir."

"Now, gentlemen," Mr. Dryasdust went on with a benevolent smile, "this little excitement being over, we will proceed with our constraining; but I may be pardoned for saying that Hardy is a fine fellow, and that we are all proud of him."

This sentiment was received with acclamation by all.

When the news reached the fifth and sixth form, it was heard with a feeling of relief, for a strong prejudice had sprung up against Hardy on account of the rumours which had been circulated respecting him.

Timor kept in his room and said nothing.



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RUSSIAN BAFFLED.

It was drawing towards the end of the half, but though the weather was cold it was still favourable for football.

One of the great house matches was that between the upper and lower elevens of Mr. Dryasdust's, and a large concourse of spectators usually assembled to witness it.

Jack Dashley was recognised as a splendid player.

So was Timor.

The Russian excelled in physical force, and particularly delighted in football, because it gave him a capital opportunity of kicking other people's shins.

He did not care a bit where the ball was; if he could see a leg, he looked upon it as lawful prey, and kicked accordingly.

He was in Funnybird Major's room the morning of the match, and they were discussing the chances of the first eleven winning it.

"It will never do to let a lower boy eleven beat us," remarked Funnybird.

"They can't do it," replied Timor.

"Still, they have a very strong team. Look at Dashley, and that new fellow Hardy. He can dribble a ball better than I can."

"See me take them both off their legs," said Timor savagely. "I'll hock them so badly that they won't be able to play."

"Mind they don't do it to you."

"They don't know how, my dear boy. I'll disable them early in the match, and we will win in a canter."

Funnybird thought that Timor was a little over-confident, but he did not like to say so, because he knew it offended him deeply to have his vanity hurt.

"I hear you are going to leave at the end of this half?" he observed.

"Yes. My father is going back to Russia and wants me with him. I have learnt all that it is necessary for me to learn at Eton."

"How jolly for you. I suppose you will be a great swell in your own country."

"A prince. My father is allied to the

royal blood, and we are awfully rich. I shall enjoy myself, I can tell you," answered Timor.

"You might give a fellow an invitation."

"If you come out there I will treat you well, for I know how to reward my friends and punish my enemies. Don't I wish I could get Dashley over there!"

"What would you do to him?"

"He should never come back again, that is one sure thing," replied Timor vindictively.

Funnybird looked in his face, and saw that he meant what he said.

"By George! I should not like to have you for an enemy," he remarked.

"That is if I was ever to go to Russia."

Timor smiled.

The football match was to take place in the afternoon, it being a half-holiday.

After dinner the boys went to the "Timbrells," as the field is called, clad in their jerseys and caps, all eager for the fray.

Bragg came up to Jack, and remarked—

"We shall have all our work cut out for us."

"I know it," replied Jack, who was in superb condition.

"You had better look out."

"Why?"

"I heard Timor talking to Funnybird Major, and he said he was going to cool shin you whenever he meets you. Fact. Slap-hang and all alive."

"I'll give the Russian tyrant as good as he sends, no fear."

The two sides took up their position, and the game began, being started in a glorious manner by Jack, who took the ball away from everybody, and, dodging the goal-keeper, very neatly kicked the first goal in less than ten minutes.

This made Timor very savage.

When the game recommenced, he deliberately went in front of Jack who was running after the ball in fine style, and "charged" him.

It was not a fair thing to do, and Jack, not liking the kick on the shin with

which Timor favoured him, returned it with interest.

A regular kicking match ensued between them.

They were both so out of breath that they could not talk, but suddenly Timor fell to the ground, and uttered a groan.

"Man hurt!" shouted Jack.

Owen Tudor had just kicked the ball out of bounds, and everybody rushed up to see what was the matter.

Timor was evidently in great pain.

Collington and Furrybird lifted him up.

"Can you walk?" asked the captain of the school.

"No," replied Timor. "I believe Dashley has broken my leg."

"You shinned me first," replied Jack.

"Is that true?"

"I heard him say he meant to do it," remarked Bragg.

"Do what?"

"Shin Dashley whenever he met him, ball or no ball in sight. Fact. Slap-bang and all alive."

"Oh, take me home, I am in such pain," said Timor.

Four big fellows with difficulty managed to carry him back to his tutor's, and there he was laid on his bed, while the doctor was sent for.

"I hope I haven't seriously injured him," said Jack to the boys who were in his room.

"Serves him right," replied Owen.

"I don't feel much sympathy for him," remarked Hardy.

Dr. Ellison arrived in half-an-hour, examined the broken limb and set it, during which operation Timor's groans were audible a long way off. He could not bear pain well.

As the doctor quitted the room, Jack stopped him.

"Can I have a word with you, doctor?" he asked.

"Be quick. I want to see Mr. Dryasdust. This is a very bad case of Timor's," replied Dr. Ellison.

"Is he so much hurt?"

"He's got a compound fracture of the leg, and will never walk straight again."

"Never?"

"He'll be lopsided to the end of his life. I never saw a leg so badly broken. Who kicked him?"

"I did."

"You must kick like a horse, Dashley. It's very unfortunate. Poor fellow! so young, too; but I suppose these accidents cannot be avoided if boys will play football. I remember, a year ago, young Robartes, the bauker's son, was lame for life in the same way. You knew him. He boarded at Evan's. It was in a match with your house, too. My word, you are hard kickers."

"It wasn't my fault, doctor."

"Perhaps not. I didn't say it was, but Timor will recollect you to his dying day," answered the doctor.

He was right, for Timor remained in bed for some weeks, and when he got up he walked with a crutch, and was helplessly lame.

One leg was shorter than the other.

His father sent for him to come up to London as soon as he was well enough to get about and be moved.

Jack met him in his tutor's yard going to one of Wise's flies which was in waiting for him.

Wishing to be kind and generous, he extended his hand.

"Good-bye," he exclaimed. "I am sorry for this—very sorry."

Timor leant against the wall, and raised his crutch threateningly.

"Curse you!" he screamed. "Get out of my way."

"Won't you say good-bye?"

"Not to you, you hound! you English brute. You—you—"

His vocabulary was exhausted, and he could not think of any more abusive epithets to hurl at his enemy.

"All right."

"My turn will come. I feel it—I know it," continued Timor, recovering himself.

"Don't be too sure of that."

"Oh," said Timor, clenching his fists, "if I only had you in Russia, you should rot in a dungeon, and I'd flog the flesh off your bones daily."

"Would you?"

"I swear it."

"Kind of you, certainly," laughed Jack, as he turned away.

Timor got into the carriage and was driven off to the railway station gnashing his teeth.

Thus did the baffled Russian leave Eton for good and all.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STARTING IN LIFE.

It was the last day of the half.

The boys did not sing *dulce domum*.

They went up town to buy the smartest ties they could get, for the fifth and sixth forms were glad to get rid of the white ones they were compelled to wear, and the lower boys were sick of their eternal black ones.

"I say, Owen," exclaimed Jack, "my father has written to me to ask if you will spend Christmas week with us."

"Has he really?—that is awfully good of him."

"You see I have mentioned you as my chum so often in my letters, that my people take quite an interest in you, and I should like you to know me at home."

"I daresay my respected parents would spare me."

"Will you come for a day or two, and telegraph?"

"Yes, I don't mind doing that," answered Owen.

So they took leave of Mr. Dryasdust, little thinking they were never to see him or the dear old college spires they loved so much again.

Timor had taken leave in the usual manner. He had, according to custom, presented the head master with a ten-pound note, and his tutor with five pounds.

He had received lots of leaving books, and all was *en règle*.

Nobody knew that Jack and Owen were not to come back again. But so it was.

Mr. Dashley had lost a quantity of money in a bankrupt concern in which he had invested.

He could not afford to keep Jack any longer at an expensive school such as Eton is.

Board and tuition came to one hundred and forty pounds a year.

Books, clothes and spending money amounted to nearly as much more, and the strain on his reduced resources could not be borne.

Accordingly he had to look out for

something for Jack to do; and he decided to put him in a commercial house, and place him in the way of becoming a rich trader.

It was not until Christmas was over that he unfolded his scheme to Jack, who, with Owen, was sitting in the dining-room of his London house after dinner.

"Jack, my boy, I cannot afford to send you back to Eton," he exclaimed.

"Why, father, I shall be captain of the boats in two years," replied Jack.

"Can't help it. I have lost a lot of money. You must go into business."

Jack looked blankly at his father.

"What business am I fit for?" he demanded.

"You will have to learn one. I am in treaty with a large London and Russian house, Krackop, Kine and Co."

"What line are they in?"

"Jute, hemp, yarn and wool."

"Well, this is a break-up and a come-down," said Jack, "but I'll do anything you wish, father, for I'm not above earning my living in any decent manner."

"That's well said, Jack."

"Still I should like to have stayed at Eton and been captain of the boats."

"Never mind. It can't be helped; misfortunes will occur in the best regulated families; and I'm sure you will be anxious to take any burden or responsibility off my shoulders."

"Certainly."

"I shall give you a good start in life; all the rest depends upon yourself."

"And shall I have to go to Russia?"

"In a month's time," replied Mr. Dashley.

Owen Tudor had listened attentively to this conversation.

"I don't want to be separated from Jack, sir," he exclaimed. "Do you think you could get me something to do in the same house?"

"In Krackop, Kine and Co's?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have no doubt I could with a little trouble. You will, both of you, have to learn Russian at once."

"Is it a difficult language?"

"Not very."

"I'll soon pick it up," said Jack.

"And I," cried Owen, sanguinely.

"Bravo, lads; you've got the right stuff in you," exclaimed Mr. Dashley.

Owen Tudor obtained his father's consent to accompany Jack to Russia.

In a month's time they started for St. Petersburg.

BOOK II.

TIMOR'S REVENGE.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CHIEF OF THE POLICE.

It was winter in St. Petersburg.

Also it was the height of the season.

A grand mansion on the Nevsky Prospect was lighted up from top to bottom, and it was evident that a party was in preparation.

A drosky drove up, and a man, dressed in furs, sprang out.

"Wait!" he said simply.

The driver saluted him in military fashion, and the man in furs, which were rich and costly, rang the bell loudly.

He was instantly admitted.

"Is the Duke of Cronstadt within?" asked the stranger.

"He is in the reception-room, sir," replied the domestic. "Who shall I have the honour to announce?"

The stranger handed him a card on which was written the name—

"Osman."

"Will you have the kindness to wait, sir, while I see my master?"

"Certainly."

The domestic crossed the hall, entered a room, and was absent a few minutes, when he returned.

"Follow me, if you please," he exclaimed.

Osman was conducted into the reception-room, which was full of guests.

A band discoursed sweet music from another apartment, and dancing was going on, while a buzz of conversation arose on either side.

The *élite* of Russian society was collected that night in the house of the Duke of Cronstadt.

A prince of blood royal—the blood of

the house of Romanoff—was expected to grace the party with his presence.

A dark, swarthy man was standing at the entrance to the room, and to him Osman offered his hand.

"Ah, Osman!" he exclaimed. "Is it you?"

"Yes, Ivan," was the reply.

"Hush! In England I was known as Ivan, when I lived with the gipsies. Now I am myself again."

"The emperor has pardoned you?"

"Precisely. He has given me back my title and estates. I am the Duke of Cronstadt, with an income of five millions of roubles a-year. Never will I conspire against him again. Alexander is a noble monarch, and deserves the respect of all his subjects."

"Amen to that," replied Osman. "Come with me into a private room, there I can talk to you alone."

"Have you news for me then?"

"What do you and the chief of the police pay me for?" asked Osman.

"That is true."

Ivan, who a few months before was a gipsy, living in a tent in whatever neighbourhood the tribe he had attached himself to chose to settle—whether it was Ascot Heath or Wandsworth Common—was now the favourite of the Emperor of Russia, restored to his title and estate, and, in fact, one of the grandees of St. Petersburg.

Apologising to those who stood round him, he led the way into a private cabinet.

Osman was a short, thick-set man,

with dark eyes and hair, the eyes having a ferrety appearance, and he was generally snake-like in his manner.

He was nothing more nor less than a police spy.

Born in Turkey, he had been brought up in Russia, and when Ivan was disgraced on account of a conspiracy in which he was mixed up, he and Ivan had fled to England.

They joined the gipsies and led a hard life, until the emperor pardoned them, and they were able to return to their native country.

"Now," exclaimed Ivan, Duke of Cronstadt, shutting the door of the cabinet, "what have you to say?"

"They are here," replied Osman.

"To whom do you allude?"

"Your enemies."

"I have none. Am I not the friend of the emperor? Who dares to be my enemy?"

"Have you forgotten the Eton boys—Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor—who were so much trouble to Timor?"

Ivan stamped his foot angrily on the floor.

"I know who you mean," he said; "but what are they doing in St. Petersburg?"

"You told me to look after them, and I found out that they have been a week in this city."

"As what?"

"As commercial clerks, engaged in the great house of Krackop, Kine, and Co."

"Confound it! cried Ivan. "I would give half my fortune if they were not here. Timor, whose title, as you know, is Prince of Moscow, is expected from Livadia to-morrow, and will want to make love to Effie."

The spy smiled.

"The lady Effie is under your protection," he said. "What have you to fear from the English dogs?"

"She loves Jack of Eton and hates Timor."

Osman, the spy, reflected a moment.

"Is his Excellency Irkontok, the chief of the police, here to-night?" he asked.

"Yes. He is preparing for the reception of His Majesty the Emperor, who has condescended to honour me with his presence to-night," replied Ivan.

"You are in high favour, my lord."

"It is time I was, for his majesty has frowned upon me long enough. But why did you allude to Irkontok?"

"Shall I call him in? His advice may be of use to us in this emergency."

"By all means do so."

Osman left the cabinet, while Ivan paced the floor impatiently.

The presence of Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor in St. Petersburg troubled him sorely, for it threatened to interfere with his plans.

He had adopted Effie Vavasour as his daughter, and she was to be introduced to the emperor that evening as the affianced bride of Timor, Prince of Moscow.

Presently the chief of the Russian secret police entered the room, preceded by the spy.

"My dear Irkontok," exclaimed Ivan, "may I trespass upon your well-known kindness and good nature for a brief space?"

"With pleasure, my lord duke," was the reply.

The chief of the police was a tall, thin man, with a careworn expression of countenance, but having an eye like a hawk, and a nose curved like the beak of a parrot.

His office was no sinecure.

It was known that there were desperate people in St. Petersburg, who were conspiring against the life of the Emperor of all the Russias.

It was his duty to ferret out these assassins and bring them to justice.

He had no peace, night nor day.

No wonder his looks were careworn, and his manner restless.

"You are acquainted with my adopted daughter, Miss Effie Vavasour?" continued Ivan.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting her."

"She is to marry my nephew, Timor, the Prince of Moscow, whom I may say she does not like, through having formed an unfortunate attachment to an English youth named Jack Dashley, who with his chum has arrived in St. Petersburg, to hold a position in the house of Krackop, Kine and Co."

"What are you afraid of?" asked the chief of the police.

"I fear that Dashley and she will meet. If so, all my plans will miscarry."

"Ah! that is grave."

"What do you advise?" asked Ivan, anxiously.

Without a moment's hesitation the chief of the police turned to Osman.

"If my memory serves me right," he exclaimed, "ten years ago you were convicted of forgery on a bank in Odessa?"

The spy hung his head.

"Why rouse up my antecedents?" he replied, while a blush of shame and mortification mantled his cheeks.

"Is it true?"

"Yes."

"Very well; then it follows that you can imitate people's handwriting."

"I was once an engraver, and can copy anything," said Osman.

"That is what I want to ascertain," cried Irkонток. "Now, you made a report to me this morning, in which you stated that you had succeeded in joining the Nihilists who are to meet at ten o'clock to-morrow night in Neva Street No. 13, under the presidency of their leaders, Plevsky and that desperate conspirator whose name nobody knows, but who is called 'Death's Head.'"

"That is so, excellency."

"You further stated that to-morrow night lots would be drawn by the conspirators to see who is to shoot the emperor."

"I heard it from their own lips."

"And I have made arrangements to have the house surrounded by police, while another body will make a sudden irruption and arrest all the members of the band."

"Well?" ejaculated Ivan.

"Let this man write in Miss Effie's hand a letter to the English youth, saying she has heard of his arrival in St. Petersburg, and will meet him at the house, 13, Neva Street, at ten to-morrow evening. Give the password, which is—"

He looked inquiringly at the government spy.

"Balkans," exclaimed Owen, "preceded by five knocks given in slow succession. That will ensure the youth admittance."

"The raid will be made immediately after his entry, and being found among Nihilists he will be sent to the mines with the rest for the term of his natural

life. That will rid you effectually of him."

Ivan was delighted with this scheme.

It was worthy of the brain of the chief of the Russian police.

Ivan extended his hand and grasped that of Irkонток most warmly.

"I have to thank you greatly," he said. "The scheme will work well. When Prince Timor arrives he will join in my gratitude."

"You over-rate my poor ability," replied Irkонток.

"Not in the least, your scheme is excellent."

At this moment the door opened and a young man, attired in evening dress and glittering with diamonds, entered.

"Whomentioned the name of Timor?" he asked.

All turned round in astonishment.

"Ah!" cried Ivan. "It is the Prince of Moscow, my nephew. Welcome, Timor! I did not expect you until to-morrow."

"Hearing that you were about to give a reception to-night, uncle, and that the emperor was kind enough to honour the Duke of Cronstadt with his presence, I quitted my estates in Livadia a day earlier than I intended."

"Again I say you are welcome."

"I trust I have not interrupted any private business between yourself and our good friend Irkонток, who has the reputation of being the best chief of the police that we have ever had?"

"Not in the slightest degree."

"What, may I ask, was your topic of conversation?"

"You shall hear, for it will interest you. Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor are in St. Petersburg."

"The deuce! My worst enemies in this city," cried Timor.

"Osman, who is our spy, has found them out. They are in the house of Krackop, Kine and Co. as clerks."

"By Jove, it seems to me that I shall have my revenge after all!"

"It is already within your grasp. Thanks to Irkонток, we have settled everything. Osman will write a letter to Jack purporting to come from Effie, and ask him to meet her at the house in the Neva Street where the Nihilists meet. Irkонток will seize the band to-morrow evening. Jack, being among Nihilists,

will be sent to Siberia as a conspirator. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"What think you of the plot?"

"It is a capital one."

Ivan opened a drawer in an escritoire and took from it a letter which was in Effie's handwriting.

It was one which she had written to Jack, but which had been intercepted, without her knowledge, by Ivan, and detained.

"Let this be your text," said Ivan.

"Yes, my lord," answered Osman.

"Sit down, write the letter, and despatch it at once."

The spy bowed, and taking the letter began to study the characters, writing short sentences, and imitating the letters of the alphabet as Effie wrote them.

A fanfare of trumpets in the court-yard of the mansion was heard.

"The emperor has arrived," cried Ivan.

"We must receive him with becoming dignity," replied Timor.

They hurried to the grand saloon, leaving Osman at his base work, the object of which was to remove Jack Dashley and place him in slavery for life.

Irkontok rushed among the guests, and spoke in hurried whispers to several people, who were police agents in disguise.

To look at them you would have thought that they were gentlemen of independent means, and not the wretched *mouchards* they were in reality.

In a few minutes the Czar Alexander made his appearance in the uniform of the Imperial Guard.

His breast was covered with stars and orders, noticeable among which was the badge of St. George and the Dragon, emblematical of the Order of the Garter, which had been bestowed upon him by Her Majesty Victoria, Queen of England.

He was in excellent health, but a melancholy look pervaded his singularly handsome countenance.

The Czar of all the Russias was troubled in his mind.

His subjects were discontented, and he every day received threatening letters from anonymous writers.

He could trust nobody.

Ivan received his illustrious guest

with an ease and courtesy which showed that he was accustomed to move in good society.

"Your majesty has made me the proudest of your subjects," said he, "by visiting my house this evening."

"We are glad to honour a faithful subject," replied the czar.

Effie was standing by, dressed in white satin, and looking very lovely.

"Permit me to introduce to your favourable notice, my adopted daughter, Miss Vavasour," continued Ivan.

The emperor smiled.

"Let her advance," he rejoined.

Ivan beckoned to Effie, who made a low curtsey, and stood trembling in the presence of his majesty.

"A sweet child," said the emperor. "I congratulate you, my lord duke."

"Your highness is too kind. We propose that Prince Timor shall wed her."

"She is worthy to grace our court."

The band at this moment struck up the National Anthem, and the czar walked up the room with Ivan, bowing right and left.

A throne had been prepared for him at the upper end.

He took his seat, and, surrounded by courtiers, watched the dancing, which immediately commenced.

Timor offered his arm to Effie.

"May I have the honour of dancing with you, Miss Vavasour?" he exclaimed,

"Yes," she replied; "I suppose it is my fate."

"Do not talk like that. I adore the ground you walk upon."

"You know my sentiments towards you," said Effie.

He placed his arm round her waist, and they began to waltz to the air of the beautiful "Blue Danube."

Timor was a very graceful dancer, as also was Effie.

It seemed to be natural to her to dance and sing.

They attracted general attention, which was turned into admiration, as they glided softly through the mazes of the waltz.

"Look at Prince Timor and the lovely Effie—how well they step together," murmured the spectators.

When the dance was over, Timor led her to a seat and placed himself by her side.

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"AN ATTEMPT HAS BEEN MADE UPON MY LIFE. PURSUE HIM," CRIED THE CZAR."



"Are you happy with Ivan?" he asked.

"He is kind to me," was the reply.

"That is no answer to my question."

"I am not happy, and you know it," Effie exclaimed. "Why was I taken away from my father? Why brought here against my will?"

"For my sake. Make up your mind to be my wife—that is your destiny."

"Never!" cried Effie. "I will appeal to the emperor if you persecute me further."

Timor laughed harshly.

"Ivan and I can do what we like with the emperor," he answered; "so you may abandon any hope of assistance in that quarter. Mine you shall be, whether you like it or not."

He glared at her with the savage look of a wild beast.

"The fact is you are thinking of Dashley," said Timor, after a pause.

"I dreamt of him last night," replied Effie.

"What was your dream?"

"I thought he was in the coils of a huge serpent, and the snake had a face like you."

"You are not very complimentary, upon my word."

Effie made no reply.

The music struck up again, and a gentleman came to claim her hand for the next dance, so that Timor had no further opportunity of talking to her.

"By Heaven! I'll tame that girl's proud spirit," he muttered, "or, I'll break her heart."

The emperor was passing out of the room, having stayed about half-an-hour, and he shook hands with Timor.

"I am glad to see you back again, prince," exclaimed the czar. "Is your health good?"

"Thank your majesty, I am in perfect health."

"I must congratulate you on the choice your uncle, the Duke of Cronstadt, has made of a wife for you."

"Unfortunately, your majesty, the young lady does not love me as much as I do her."

The emperor laughed musically.

"That is nothing," he said. "When she is used to you, association will be as strong as love. Adieu, my dear prince."

Saying this, the emperor descended the stairs, Timor bowing to the ground.

In the courtyard the royal carriage was in waiting, guarded by a detachment of mounted Cossacks.

Their heavy fur capes, strange-looking caps, and long lances, made them appear very picturesque in the moonlight.

When the emperor had departed for the Winter Palace, Timor entered the cabinet in which Osman had been left at work.

He had just finished writing.

"Is your task completed?" asked Timor.

"Yes, my prince," was the reply.

"Allow me to look at it."

Osman showed him a letter, carefully composed in a lady's handwriting, which, in fact, was an exact *fac simile* of Effie's.

It ran as follows—

"MY DEAR JACK OF ETON,—I have heard of your arrival at St. Petersburg, and wonder that you have not been to see me yet. Perhaps you do not know where I am living. Ivan is my adopted father. His title is the Duke of Cronstadt. Timor is the Prince of Moscow. I hate Timor as much as ever. Will you meet me to-morrow evening at ten o'clock, at 13, Neva Street? Utter the word 'Balkans' after knocking at the door five times. It will be better and safer than coming to the house of Ivan. Believe me, with a thousand kisses and best wishes,

"Your loving
"EFFIE."

"Will that do, my prince?" inquired the spy.

"Excellently well," answered Timor. "See that it is delivered this evening."

"I will take it myself."

"Do you know where Mr. Dashley is living?"

"Oh, yes. He and Owen are at the Prospect Hotel."

"Good."

Nodding his head approvingly, Timor sought the ball-room again, and once more mingled with the dancers.

He saw Ivan and Irkontok talking excitedly together, which caused him to approach to learn the reason of their agitation.

"The audacity of these Nihiliste,"

exclaimed the chief of the police, "is unexampled."

"What have they done now?" asked Timor.

"Look here," replied Irkontok; "this has just been dropped at my feet, and I cannot tell by whom."

He handed Timor a slip of paper, on which was written in legible characters these words—

"Base slave of a tyrant king, this is to inform you that in spite of all your precautions, your emperor will be killed

on his way home to his palace to-night.

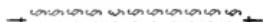
"ONE WHO KNOWS."

"It is a joke," cried Timor.

"On the contrary," said Ivan. "I fear it will be a sad reality."

"Still," remarked Irkontok, "his majesty is well guarded by his faithful Cossacks."

In spite of this observation, the chief of the police was ill at ease, and both Ivan and Timor shared his apprehensions of evil.



CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ATTEMPTED CRIME.

JACK DASHLEY and Owen Tudor had only been a few weeks in St. Petersburg.

They had acquired a tolerably accurate knowledge of the Russian language before leaving England, and soon settled down to their business in the great export house of Krackop, Kine, and Co.

Not finding it easy to acquire lodgings in the English style, where you can pay a certain price for your rooms and attendance, they have taken up their abode at the "Prospect Hotel."

Ever since his arrival in the city, Jack had endeavoured to find some trace of Effie, but without success.

He did not know that Ivan was, in his own country, called Duke of Cronstadt, nor was he aware that Timor was the Prince of Moscow.

After dinner, on the night of Ivan's reception, Jack and Owen were sitting in their comfortably-furnished private apartment, in which they did not in the least feel the cold, as a huge, self-feeding stove, which burned day and night, kept the temperature up to about 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

"How do you like Russia, Jack?" asked Owen.

"I've nothing to grumble at so far," replied Jack.

"I don't mind being away from home and friends, because I have got you with me," remarked Owen.

"Same here."

"It's jolly cold," continued Owen. "But there is one comfort, the weather

does not change. It keeps cold for months together. It is consistent weather, and a fellow knows how to dress."

"Yes," answered Jack, "the climate is not nearly as trying as that of England. Heigho! I wonder where dear little Effie is?"

"Oh, aren't you spoony?" laughed Owen.

"So would you be if you had a nice little girl like that to love; and you would be worried in your mind, too, if you did not know where she was or what was happening to her."

"I suppose I should."

"What do you say to a walk?" asked Jack.

"No, thank you. A cigarette and a read at a good entertaining book is more in my line," answered Owen, with a yawn.

"Come out and let's take a stroll."

"Not to-night, if you'll kindly excuse me."

"Well, I shall go. I feel I want to go out this evening, though I couldn't tell why or what for if you were to give me a thousand pounds."

Owen pointed to the window, through the glass of which the full moon was visible, riding high and clear in the heavens.

"Perhaps, like other lunatics, the moon has an effect on you," he observed.

"What do you call yourself?" laughed Jack.

"I'm sane enough, to stay in a hot room, anyhow."

"I hope the stove will bake you."

"That's a nice wish," retorted Owen. "Do you want to find your chum, when you come home, reduced to the consistency of a mummy?"

"There are worse things than mummies."

"Many thanks, but I don't want to be embalmed yet. Go and enjoy your walk and I'll keep house."

"All right."

Jack put on his fur coat and seal-skin cap with the ear mufflers, also his india-rubber over-shoes, and his thick gloves lined with swansdown.

Shaking hands with Owen, and saying he would not be long gone, he left the hotel, and walked along the Nevsky Prospect.

The air was piercingly cold.

Those pedestrians whom choice or necessity compelled to be out, hurried along as if their lives depended upon their exertions.

The snow was hard and crisp under foot, for it was freezing sharp.

The bridges over the River Neva were distinctly outlined by their many lamps.

Occasionally a sleigh or a drosky dashed by, but as a rule the streets were deserted, few people being abroad.

All at once Jack saw a detachment of Cossacks ride by, in their midst being the imperial carriage.

The emperor was returning from the party given by Ivan, Duke of Cronstadt.

Suddenly they came to a halt.

A sledge had been upset in the middle of the road, and it was necessary to remove it before the cavalcade could proceed.

The emperor's carriage stopped, and the czar himself got out to see what the nature of the obstruction was.

At this moment a man sprang forward from a doorway in which he had concealed himself, and producing a pistol, levelled it at the emperor.

He was only twelve paces distant.

His face was rigidly set, and the most determined look sat upon his features as he prepared to pull the trigger.

It was a question of life or death.

Jack grasped the situation in a moment, seeing that it was an attempt to kill the czar.

Rushing forward, he knocked up the man's arm just as he discharged the pistol, and the bullet whistled harmlessly through the air.

At the same time he dealt the would-be assassin a blow under the ear which stretched him senseless on the snow.

Bending down, he seized him by the throat.

"Ha!" he cried, "I've got you, my friend."

Hearing the shot, the Cossacks who formed the imperial guard came up, and the emperor himself advanced.

The assassin was immediately secured, and Jack, panting with exertion, stood bare-headed before the czar.

"You have saved my life!" exclaimed the emperor. "Who are you?"

"An English boy, your majesty, employed by the firm of Krackop, Kine and Co.," replied Jack, bowing.

"I saw your brave conduct, and I thank you for your devotion from the bottom of my heart."

"Your majesty is too flattering. I only did my duty."

"Would to Heaven that all my subjects would do as much," replied the emperor, into whose eyes the tears came. "Why I should be the object of hatred I do not know. I have emancipated the serfs; but a wave of Socialism is passing over Europe."

The assassin, who was now securely bound and placed upon his feet, glared at the czar.

"Tyrant!" he exclaimed. "Why do you not liberate the political prisoners in Siberia?"

A Cossack struck him over the head with the butt-end of a pistol, and he fell bleeding to the ground.

"Take him away. This is an organized plot," said the czar.

Two Cossacks dragged the unfortunate wretch off, and the czar again directed his attention to Jack.

"How can I reward you for your timely and gallant conduct?" he demanded.

"I require no reward, your majesty. The fact is, I am in a good position, and hope to get on in the world by gaining the approval of my employers."

The emperor took a beautiful signet ring from his finger.

"Accept this as a token of my gratitude," he exclaimed.

"Oh, your majesty, it is beyond my deserts."

"Not at all. Keep it; and if you ever require a service at the hands of Alexander of Russia, send me that as a token."

Jack put the ring on his finger and bowed low.

The diamond was a stone, worth at least five hundred pounds.

The emperor got into his carriage, the Cossacks surrounded it as before, the broken sledge was removed, and his majesty returned to his palace.

Jack Dashley was very much elated at his good luck.

It was a great thing to have made a friend of the Emperor of Russia, and he hastened back to his hotel to tell his chum, Owen Tudor, all about it.

When he reached the hotel he heard some one talking to the clerk in the hall.

"I want Mr. Dashley, of England, belonging to the firm of Krackop, Kine and Co.," said the stranger.

"He's not in, sir," replied the clerk.

"His chum, Mr. Tudor, will do as well."

"Mr. Tudor is upstairs, sir, in No. 7. John, show the gentleman to No. 7."

John was an English waiter, and he at once said—

"Come this way, sir."

Jack Dashley thought he knew the voice of the speaker, and stepped forward to get a look at his face.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Is that you Bragg?"

"Yes, my dear boy. Slap-bang and all alive," replied that individual. "My dad died of bronchitis; left me all his money. My guardians give me a good allowance. Want to see the world and all that sort of thing. Thought I'd come and give you a look up, you know."

"I'm awfully glad to see you, dear boy."

"Knew you would be. Guardians wanted me to go to Oxford. Not for Joe. Not good enough by a long way."

"You don't like work."

"I like it well enough to look on and see it done. I was born lazy, and haven't had time to get rested yet.

Classics no good. Greek and Latin all bosh for a man with a thousand a-year."

"So much as that?"

"That is the income of your humble servant," replied Bragg. "Slap-bang and all alive."

"Come upstairs into our room; you'll find Tudor there."

"With all the pleasure in the world."

"Have you ordered your bed?"

"Yes; five minutes ago. I should like to see Owen, though Funnybird Minor did call him a Welsh goat, and ba-a at him."

They walked up the grand staircase together.

"Have you seen or heard anything of Timor?" asked Bragg.

"No," replied Jack.

"I heard in travelling that he was reinstated in the emperor's favour, and has taken his title of Prince of Moscow, while Ivan is the Duke of Cronstadt."

"That is news to me."

They reached the room, and found Owen asleep in front of the stove.

"Here's an old friend come to see you."

Owen stretched himself, and looking hard at Bragg, sprang quickly to his feet.

Extending his hand to Bragg, Owen exclaimed—

"Delighted to see you."

"Same here," answered Bragg. "How do you find yourself?"

"First-class. What brought you here?"

"Money, in connection with an express train."

"That's something new, isn't it? You used not to be over flush."

"Ah, things are altered. Governor gone to the mole country. Underground, you know. Guardians kind; part like lambs. Seeing the world. Slap-bang, and all alive, you know," replied Bragg.

"Sit down and make yourself at home," exclaimed Owen, adding—"By the way, there is a letter for you, Jack."

"Wait till I tell you my adventure," replied Jack.

"Oh, you have had an adventure? What a romantic being you are!"

"I saved the emperor's life. A fellow was going to shoot at him. I knocked his arm up; he was captured, and the czar gave me his ring. Look at it."

Jack held up his finger in the light of the gas, which made the gem sparkle brilliantly.

"Is that a fact?" asked Owen in surprise.

"Do I tell stories, dear boy?" asked Jack, in a tone of reproach.

"By George! you are in luck."

Jack took the letter, opened, and read it.

"Here's another surprise," he exclaimed. "A letter from Effie."

"Never!" exclaimed Owen.

"She says that she has heard of my arrival in St. Petersburg, and wants to see me at No. 17, Neva Street, tomorrow. Password, 'Balkans,' give five knocks. It sounds very mysterious."

"Don't go," said Bragg.

"Why not?"

"I'm afraid it's a plant."

"If it is, I'll chance it. I'd run any risk to see Effie once more."

"Remember that Ivan and Timor are in Russia, and in high favour with the emperor," said Owen Tudor, gravely.

Jack read the letter over again.

"I shall go," he replied; "that's flat."

"And you'll be a flat," remarked Bragg.

"That's a matter of opinion."

"Is there any address on the letter?"

"None."

"That makes it more suspicious. Don't you go. If she wants you she'll come to you."

"I'll risk it. I'm not afraid."

"More fool you."

"You're complimentary," remarked Jack.

"I don't mean to be offensive—only speak for your good. Slap-bang, and all alive, my dear fellow," answered Bragg.

"I think we ought to have a bowl of punch to celebrate the arrival of the great Bragg," remarked Owen.

"Good idea that," replied Bragg.

The bell was rung, and the punch ordered.

They spent a merry evening together, talking over old times, and did not separate until the small hours of the morning.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

In a small house in Neva Street, not far from the river, lived a man named Plevsky.

He was short in stature, and so thin that there seemed to be little life in him; but if his body was small, his mind was large.

Plevsky was only thirty years of age, and he had set himself the task of regenerating Russia.

It was his fanatical opinion that it was necessary to assassinate the emperor in order to produce liberal reforms.

At certain intervals friends of his who shared his opinions met at his house.

They had decided that they would draw lots to see who should fire upon the czar.

When evening came the conspirators arrived one by one, gave the required knocks, uttered the password, and were admitted.

Osman was among the earliest to come.

Little did they think that they had a traitor in their midst!

About fifteen men, hard visaged, determined, full of energy and courage, devoted to their country, and not caring a rush for their lives, were assembled in a large room.

The most remarkable personage in the group was "Death's Head."

This man was skeletonic, being in reality an attenuated ascetic; his eyes were deeply sunk in their sockets, his cheeks were sunken, his bones seemed to protrude through his clothes, and his face was absolutely bloodless.

No one knew who he was, or where he came from.

But he was the guiding spirit of this daring band of Nihilists.

"My friends," exclaimed Death's Head, "the hour has come. We want but the man who shall strike the blow."

"Hear, hear!" replied the conspirators. "Someone last night attempted to

take the life of the tyrant who misrules our unhappy country. He was not one of us, yet it shows the spirit which pervades the people. We must be free."

"We will!" cried Plevsky.

"Let us draw lots," said Osman.

Death's Head waved his arm.

"It is unnecessary," he exclaimed. "I volunteer my services, and will be the regicide."

Every one looked at him with admiration.

They all considered that his devotion to the cause was sublime.

"Yes, brothers," he continued, "I will, unaided, kill the monster who sends us in thousands to die in the mines of Siberia. Leave me to work out the details; trust me and all will be well."

Great applause followed this brief speech.

Just then a knock was heard at the door, and Osman jumped from his seat.

"I think I know who it is," he exclaimed. "I have made a convert, and asked him to visit us to-night. Shall I go to the door?"

"Certainly," replied Plevsky. "Any friend of yours is welcome."

The spy left the room, traversed the hall, and admitted Jack, who uttered the password.

"Is a lady here waiting to see me?" asked Jack, shaking the snow, which was falling fast, off his fur coat.

"She has not yet arrived," answered Osman.

"You know whom I mean, I suppose?"

"Miss Effie Vavasour."

"Precisely."

"I expect her every minute," replied Osman. "Will you come inside? I have a few friends here to-night who are talking politics."

Unsuspecting of anything wrong, Jack walked into the room and bowed to the assembled company.

"A brother," said Osman.

"Freedom or death," cried Plevsky.

Jack wondered what they meant, but sat down by the side of Osman, and lighted a cigarette, which the latter presented him with.

All at once a tremendous noise was heard at the door.

It seemed as if a battering ram was being used against it.

Everyone in the room turned pale as death, and sprang to their feet, drawing knives, pistols, and other weapons.

"We are betrayed," exclaimed Plevsky.

"Curses be on the traitors!" cried Death's Head.

Crash!

The door was broken open, and a crowd of police rushed into the room, headed by the dreaded Irkontok itself.

All was confusion and dismay.

The conflict which ensued was brief but sanguinary; revolvers were freely used, and the police handled their heavy clubs in a brutal manner.

Bravely the conspirators defended themselves, for they were fighting for their lives, and they knew it.

Osman seized Jack by the arm, and dragged him into a corner, where they were comparatively out of harm's way.

"Let me go," said Jack.

"Hush! you are safe here," replied Osman.

In a few minutes the conspirators were all either killed, wounded, or captured, with the exception of Death's Head.

How he managed to escape nobody knew.

It was a fact, however, that he contrived to elude the vigilance of the secret police and get clear off.

Irkontok, the chief of the police, had his arm shattered by a bullet, but he bore himself bravely.

"Handcuff the ruffians," he exclaimed. "Put manacles on all of them."

Two policemen advanced to Jack and grasped him roughly by the neck.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"You have heard the orders of our chief," was the reply.

"But I am not a conspirator."

"Why are you here then?"

"I came to meet a young lady."

The policeman laughed ironically, as he dexterously slipped the iron bands on Jack's hands.

"This is an outrage," cried Jack. "I am an Englishman, and my ambassador will make you suffer for this. Call your chief."

Irkontok heard the loud tone in which Jack was talking, and came up.

"What are you talking about?" he asked, in a voice which trembled with the pain of his wound.

"How dare you arrest me?" replied Jack. "I don't know these men."

"We know you as one of the conspirators," answered Irkontok.

"I never conspired in my life. The fact is I am a clerk in a commercial house, and came here to meet a young lady. I can show you her letter."

"Tell that to your judges."

"You are a brute."

Irkontok gave him a blow on the

mouth which loosened his teeth and made the blood flow freely.

"Take him away, and put him in one of the lowest dungeons in the fortress of St. Peter. Let no one have access to him," exclaimed the chief of the secret police.

In spite of his remonstrances, Jack was dragged away, put into a sledge, and conveyed to the prison.

His guards would not answer any question that was put to them.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN PRISON.

JACK was conveyed by the Cossacks who had him in charge to the fortress of St. Peter.

A gloomier prison can scarcely be imagined. Its frowning walls and narrow casemented windows seemed to be the embodiment of despair.

During his journey to this abode of misery, he contrived adroitly to slip the ring which the emperor had given him off his finger and put it in his boot.

It was his only hope.

How to get it to the emperor he did not know, and he was too stupefied to think.

When the prison was reached the guards rang a bell at the gate, which was immediately opened, and the sledge into which he had been hastily put, was driven into the courtyard.

As the gate banged to behind him it seemed to sound the knell of doom.

Never had Jack felt so utterly prostrated in his life.

However, with true British pluck, he contrived to keep his spirit up to a certain extent, and, being brought before the governor, held his head erect.

The governor was a tall hirsute man of military appearance, which was warranted from the fact of his having served in the army during the Crimean war.

"Who is this?" he asked, twirling his iron-grey moustache.

"A Nihilist suspect," replied the sergeant of the guard, touching his cap.

"Cell number three," exclaimed the governor.

Two Cossacks seized Jack by the arms

and were about to drag him away, when, with a desperate effort he restrained them and faced the governor of the fortress.

"Allow me to speak," he cried.

"Not a word; away with him," was the rude and arbitrary answer.

"I will speak, and you shall hear me."

Alarmed, or interested at his defiant manner, the governor said—

"Well, I will hear you. What have you to say?"

"Simply this," answered Jack. "I am no Nihilist. I have no connection whatever with them. I am an Englishman in the employ of Krackop, Kine and Co."

"That does not prevent you from being a revolutionist. All you Englishmen have the idea of Socialists."

"I will appeal to the emperor."

"That you will have small chance of doing."

"Will you send a message from me to him, or can I communicate with my friends?" asked Jack.

"No."

"When shall I be tried?"

"The chances are that you will not be tried at all. We send a batch of prisoners off to the Siberian mines in a day or two, and the odds are you will go with them."

"Is this Russian justice?" asked Jack.

The governor shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose you were found with the conspirators or you would not be here," he answered.

"But it is all a mistake. I received a letter—"

"I can hear no more; cell number three," interrupted the governor.

And Jack was taken away along the corridor by the Cossacks, preceded by a gaoler, who held in his hands a large bunch of keys.

Jack had to submit to his fate, and with a heavy heart entered a dungeon which the gaoler unlocked.

He was thrust in, and, the door being locked upon him, he sank upon the floor half dazed at his helpless condition.

For more than an hour he remained in a state of stupor, for all was dark, and the surroundings miserable in the extreme.

When he recovered himself he got up, groped about the room, found a pallet bed on which he reclined, in vain trying to sleep.

It was all a mystery to him.

Why should Effie have written to him in order to get him arrested as a conspirator?

She was incapable of such a thing.

Then it must have been a plot; but by whom concocted?

He thought the matter over in his mind.

"Timor!" he ejaculated, loudly.

At that moment the key grated in the lock, the door swung back, and Timor himself appeared on the threshold.

"I am here," he exclaimed, with a dry laugh.

"You!" cried Jack, springing up from the bed.

"Yes; I have caged my bird."

"Then you are the author of this infamous outrage?"

"Undoubtedly. I am not a boy at Eton," replied Timor, "but a Russian prince, high in the favour and confidence of the emperor. My word is law. I had a letter written in Effie's name. You fell into the trap and you are here,"

Jack groaned in anguish of spirit.

"How do you like it?" continued Timor, with a malicious glare in his deep-set black eyes.

"Wretch! you are unworthy to live," replied Jack.

"My good fellow," said Timor, "don't think I have half done with you yet; this is only a portion of my revenge. I will keep you here for months. I will

have you knouted. You shall see my marriage with Effie, and then you can go to the mines as a white slave for the term of your natural life."

"Perhaps," rejoined Jack.

"Why do you say 'perhaps'?"

"We shall see."

"Do you doubt my power?" asked Timor, stamping his foot on the floor of the cell in an imperious manner.

"You may be powerful, but the emperor is more so."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Timor, "what is the czar to you? I can tell you that I am more powerful here than his imperial majesty. I hold the office of Superintendent of Prisons, and can come in here and do as I please whenever I like."

When he had finished speaking he struck Jack a blow on the side of the head which sent him reeling up against the wall.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

Jack recovered himself in an instant.

"Simply that it is only lent, and I am going to pay it back," he cried.

Before Timor knew what was going to happen to him, he received Jack's fist under his left eye, and rolling up against the gaoler, upset that functionary, lantern and all, falling on the top of him.

It was a knock-down blow and no mistake, for fully a minute elapsed before Timor recovered himself.

"What did you hit me for? How dare you do it?" he demanded.

"You attacked me first," replied Jack.

"I'll have you flogged for this tomorrow, see if I don't," continued Timor. "I'll punish you. Confound it! I shall have a black eye and shall not be able to see Effie."

"All the better," replied Jack.

"Wait for the morrow. I'll pay you, you English dog," cried Timor, shaking his fist threateningly.

"Go on, you Russian bear," retorted Jack.

Timor quitted the cell, and the door was locked again, leaving the poor prisoner in darkness.

But though the future looked very black indeed for Jack, he knew whom he had to thank for the plot which had got

him into a Russian prison, with very small chance of getting out again.

The night passed in a truly miserable manner.

Jack found it impossible to sleep.

When the grey dawn of morning came, he looked out of the iron-bound window into the courtyard below, in which was a solitary sentry, armed with a rifle, pacing to and fro.

It was a relief to watch the movements of this man.

After a time the sentry, who was evidently cold and sleepy, retired into a small wooden hut, placed against the outer wall of the prison.

Jack was about to turn away and throw himself on his rude pallet in the hope of getting a few hours' rest when something else arrested his attention.

This was very peculiar.

What appeared to be a monkey was seen on the top of the wall.

It let a rope ladder fall down into the yard, and quickly descended by it, and creeping on hands and knees, it crossed to the prison and began to look in at the windows, climbing up pipes, hanging on to bars, and taking advantage of every stone coping that came in its way.

Jack's cell was on the ground-floor tier.

Suddenly the strange creature came to his grated window.

"Jack of Eton! Jack of Eton!" it exclaimed in a low, but distinctly audible voice.

This caused Jack to start and made his heart beat faster.

"Halloo!" he replied. "Who calls me?"

The strange thing began to laugh in a joyous manner.

"Don't you know me?" it said.

"Why, it's Quicksilver!" replied Jack. "I might have known it by the way you climbed about, as no one else could have done it. Who expected to see you in Russia? What brought you here? and how did you know I was in prison?"

"I followed you, Master Jack."

"Where did you get the means?"

"Mr. Sedgwick paid me my wages, and I worked my way to Cronstadt as a cabin boy on board ship. When I got to this cold place, I went to Krackop, Kine and

Co., and heard you were at the 'Prospect Hotel.'"

"Well?"

"There I saw Owen and Bragg. They told me that, as you had not come home, they had gone to a house where you were to meet Miss Effie, and found that the police had arrested every one as conspirators."

"I see."

"Then I discovered the prison, and knew I should discover you too. Owen and Bragg are very anxious about you, and want to know what they can do."

Jack listened attentively to all that Quicksilver said.

It was a strange, romantic thing that this poor boy should come all those miles to be with him.

"There is only one thing you can do," he answered.

"What is that?"

Jack had pushed up the window, and taking the diamond signet ring, which the Czar Alexander had given him, out of his boot, handed it to Quicksilver.

"Take this to the palace. Present it to the emperor. Tell him that I am the victim of a plot on the part of Timor, and ask him to cause me to be brought before him so that I can establish my innocence and explain everything."

Quicksilver put the ring in his pocket.

"I understand," he said.

"Be careful that no one takes it from you, as it is my only chance."

"Trust me."

Quicksilver put his hand through the bars, and shook that of Jack, then he nodded and disappeared from the window.

Creeping along as before, he crossed the yard and regained the rope ladder, up which he climbed.

When he reached the top he had to pull the ladder up and let it down on the other side.

While he was doing this the sentry emerged from his box and caught sight of the boy on the wall.

He looked, and then raised his rifle and fired.

Bang!

There was a loud report, which echoed all through the prison yard, but Quicksilver, whose eyes were all over the place, had divined his intention, and with the rapidity of lightning, ducked his head.

The shot passed harmlessly over him,

and he descended safely to the ground, running off as fast as his legs could carry him.

On hearing the shot, the alarm bell was rung violently.

The guard turned out, and the sentry being questioned, a thorough search was made inside and out of the prison, but of course without any result.

Every cell was visited.

When it was found that no one had escaped, the alarm subsided; still the fact of the rope ladder being discovered proved that the sentry had not fired without cause.

Quicksilver hastened to the hotel "Prospect" to tell Owen Tudor and Bragg what he had done, and to consult with them as to his future course of action.

He knew that he could trust implicitly in them.

They had not retired to bed, being too anxious on Jack's account to sleep.

When the boy entered their room they both jumped up and shook him heartily by the hand.

"Have you seen him?" asked Owen, eagerly.

"Yes," replied Quicksilver. "He is in the fortress—I don't know what they call it, but I had lots of trouble getting up the wall, though a lamp-post helped me a little. I did one of the biggest jumps I ever did in my life."

"What did he say?"

"He said it was all a plot of Timor's, and gave me a ring to present to the emperor."

"Bravo!" cried Owen. "Quicksey, you are a brick."

"That's a fact. Slap-bang, and all alive," exclaimed Bragg.

"Now the question is, how are we to obtain an audience of the emperor," continued Owen.

"I should advise that we wait till the morning and see your employers, Messrs. Krackop, Kine and Co. They will know how to work it," rejoined Bragg.

"Very well. We can go to bed, and we'll foil that villain Timor yet."

"I'd like to have him here," said Bragg.

"What would you do?" asked Owen.

"Give him a piece of my mind. Slap-bang, and all alive."

At this juncture a form appeared at the open door, and a voice exclaimed—
"I am at your service, gentlemen."

"Timor!" ejaculated Bragg, with a start of surprise.

Quicksilver at once crawled under the table, without being perceived.

"You were observing, Mr. Bragg, that you would like to give me a piece of your mind. If you can spare any part of that very small portion of your intellect, I shall be happy to hear it."

Bragg laughed.

"What a comical dog you are, Timor. I always liked you; but, dash it, you always will take things so seriously," he remarked.

"What did you mean?"

Owen Tudor stepped forward boldly.

"He meant, though he hasn't got the courage to say or do it, that he would kick you out of this room; and as he won't I will," he exclaimed.

"Beware," cried Timor; "you had better mind what you are about."

Owen took hold of him by the arm, swung him round as if he had been a child, and ignominiously kicked him into the passage.

At this moment Timor's face was a perfect study, for it was filled with concentrated hate, and distorted with passion.

"Very well, Mr. Owen Tudor," he said, grinning sardonically. "You will find that I did not come here for nothing."

"No," answered Owen; "you got rather more than you expected, I think."

"I shall have you and that boasting fellow Bragg arrested. You are the friends and companions of a Nihilist. We must crush the conspiracy, root and branch, in all its ramifications."

"Perhaps you will condescend to be a little more explicit."

"You may, or may not be aware that we have arrested Jack Dashley?"

"That fact is known to us," said Owen.

"Oh," sneered Timor, "you seem to be pretty well informed. You are associated with Dashley, and the chief of the secret police is on your track."

"Cowardly hound, I defy you to arrest us."

"Look here," said Bragg, "this sort of thing won't do."

"You will soon find out that it will."

Timor put a silver whistle to his lips, and blew it shrilly.

In an instant the room was full of police officers, armed to the teeth.

"Jumping Moses!" cried Bragg; "I've got myself into a nice mess."

At the head of the secret police was Irkонток.

Timor had thought it advisable to arrest Jack's friends, because they might seek the emperor, and tell him about the forged letter purporting to come from Effie Vavasour.

He did not do things by halves. Not at all.

Timor, Prince of Moscow, was not that sort of man by any means.

"Are these two the friends of the suspected Nihilist?" asked Irkонток.

"Yes; I know them well," answered Timor. "They are desperate conspirators, and have been plotting against our dear friend and father, the Czar Alexander, whom may an all-merciful Providence protect against such villains."

"Arrest them," cried the chief of the police.

The soldiers at once seized Gwen Tudor and Bill Bragg, but the former struck at the one nearest him, knocking him down.

"Leave go of me!" he exclaimed. "I'm an Englishman, and have done nothing wrong."

Half-a-dozen soldiers fell upon him.

He knocked them down like nine-pins, and in the scrimmage Timor got a blow on the nose, which he did not relish at all.

"Down with him!" yelled Timor.

"We licked you in the Crimea, and we'll give you a little more Alma, Inkerman, and Balaclava," replied Owen.

The soldiers presented their rifles at him.

"Submit, or we fire," said Irkонток.

"Submit, or we fire," echoed Owen, sneeringly. "That would be worthy of a cowardly Russian."

Irkонток snatched a rifle from a soldier, and clubbing it, advanced to Owen.

"Bragg, why don't you come to my aid?"

"Because they've tied my arms. Slap-bang, and all alive!" replied Bragg.

Bragg had passively allowed himself to be bound.

The chief of the police raised the rifle, and hit Owen a blow on the shoulder with it, which made him drop his arms, whereupon the soldiers secured him without any further difficulty.

"These are prisoners of State," said Irkонток, to the sergeant in command. "Allow no one to see them."

The two captives were immediately removed, and only Irkонток and Timor remained in the room. They were alone, as they thought.

Quicksilver, however, was under the table, and had escaped their notice.

"So far so good," remarked Timor.

"I don't think Mr. Dashley or his companions are likely to trouble you any more," replied Irkонток.

"You will see to that?"

"Certainly. They will be sent with the next chain gang to Siberia."

"But," exclaimed Timor, "who was the person who got into the prison-yard this night? Was it an attempt at a rescue?"

"Impossible to tell."

The two quitted the hotel, and Quicksilver, of whose presence in St. Petersburg Timor was ignorant, was by himself.

He lost no time in quitting the hotel.

It was now broad daylight, and about eight o'clock in the morning.

Proceeding to the business portion of the city, he found out the house of Krackop, Kine and Co., but as yet the counting-house was not open.

The air was clear and frosty, and the snow lay like a white mantle over all the street.

To amuse himself and keep himself warm, Quicksilver climbed up and down a lamp-post.

While thus engaged a man came along and paused, looking curiously at him, and saying something in Russian.

"Speak English," exclaimed Quicksilver.

"I was remarking, my young friend, that you seem to belong to the monkey tribe," continued the stranger, in very good English. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting to see Mr. Krackop."

"And what may your business be with him? I am a man of some influence, and may be able to advise you."

Being unsuspecting of harm, the boy told the stranger all about the arrest of Dashley and his friends, of his interview with Jack in the prison, and the fact of his having the emperor's ring in his possession.

This was a very imprudent thing to do, but after all, Quicksilver was only a boy.

The man's mind seemed to be filled with a fierce exultation.

Nor is this to be wondered at.

The stranger, whom Quicksilver had encountered in this accidental manner, was no other than Death's Head, the desperate and mysterious Nihilist.

"Give me the ring, my dear boy," he exclaimed. "I will seek the emperor and procure the liberation of your friends in an hour."

"Why can't I do it?"

"Because his imperial majesty will not see you. Some officer of the court will take the ring and steal it," replied Death's Head.

There seemed some probability of this.

"All right; I'll trust you," said Quicksilver; "although you've got a funny face; more like a corpse than that of a live man."

"You shall not have cause to regret placing confidence in me."

"I must go with you to the palace and wait while you go inside."

Death's Head made no objection to this, and saying, "March," the Nihilist took him by the hand, and led the way to the Winter Palace.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RING.

THE Emperor Alexander was an early riser, and it was a fact well known that he breakfasted at eight.

When the palace was reached the clocks of the city were striking ten.

"Give me the ring," exclaimed Death's Head.

Quicksilver did so, but not without some misgiving.

The Nihilist clutched it eagerly.

"Thank Heaven," muttered the enthusiast. "I shall be able to strike a blow for Russia to-day which will ring through the land."

"Eh? what's that?" inquired Quicksilver.

"Nothing. Await my return," was the reply.

Death's Head advanced to the gates of the palace, and was challenged by the sentry, who, on hearing that he wanted an audience of the emperor, sent for the officer of the guard.

Presently this official appeared.

"No one is allowed to see his majesty," he replied, in answer to the application.

"He will see me, however," said Death's Head, with a smile.

"You seem over confident."

"Not at all. Look at this ring."

He displayed the beautiful diamond,

and pointed out the imperial cypher, which greatly astonished the officer.

"Have you received any instructions respecting it?" asked the Nihilist.

"Yes; we have orders to let the bearer pass."

"Did I not tell you so? Where is the czar at the present moment?"

"Alone in the library, reading the morning papers. Shall I conduct you to his presence?"

"Yes."

"Who shall I say?"

"The bearer of the ring; that is all," answered Death's Head.

There appeared to be something odd about the stranger, yet the officer of the guard had received orders to pass the holder of the ring, and he did not see how he could be acting wrongly in obeying his instructions.

They crossed the yard of the palace, and passing the guard, entered a large marble-flagged vestibule.

This, like the yard, was full of armed men.

The military precautions that were taken resembled a state of siege.

No one made any objection to the passage of the officer of the guard and his companion, for the former was a well-

known and trusted aide-de-camp of the emperor.

Threading a corridor, in which a sentry paced backwards and forwards with the soldierly bearing of a veteran, they reached a door.

"Wait," said the officer.

He took the ring, and, knocking twice, at length entered the apartment which was known as the imperial library.

It contained hundreds of costly and rare books.

Yet, it was not on this account that the emperor valued it, for he scarcely, if ever, opened one of the valuable tomes with which its shelves were crowded.

It had been his habit for years, when residing at the Winter Palace, to seek the seclusion of the library, and be alone before receiving his secretary and minister of state.

The window looked out on the garden, which now presented a bleak and desolate appearance, owing to the frost and snow.

In the grate burned an immense sea-coal fire.

After the lapse of a few seconds the officer emerged, and ushered Death's Head into the presence.

He closed the door softly.

The Emperor of Russia and the desperate fanatical Nihilist were together alone, and face to face.

"Ha!" cried Alexander starting; "I expected to see a boy. The ring was not given to you."

"The young man sold it to me," was the reply.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" demanded the emperor, who was beginning to get alarmed.

"Listen," answered Death's Head, stolidly. "Do you remember a Polish nobleman named Paul, Count of Cracow?"

The emperor reflected for a brief space, then his face lighted up.

"Certainly I do," he replied, after a pause. "He was mixed up in the Langevitze troubles in '64. I banished him to the mines. He died in Siberia."

"No," said Death's Head, raising his voice; "he did not die, for he now stands before you."

"What! Is it possible that you are the man?"

"I escaped, and have lived for vengeance."

"On whom?"

"On you, infamous tyrant that you are."

Death's Head, as we shall still call him, spoke threateningly, and with great excitement.

Frightened at his attitude, the emperor extended his hand towards the table, upon which was a bell, and also a small ivory-handled pistol of exquisite workmanship.

"Raise your voice, stir hand or foot, and you are a dead man," cried the Nihilist.

With difficulty controlling his alarm, the czar sat motionless.

"That is well," continued his visitor, who drew from his sleeve a dagger of Venetian make, composed entirely of glass.

The assassin who uses a dagger of this kind, plunges it into the body of his victim, as near the heart as possible, and breaks off the handle, so that the blade disappears under the flesh, and cannot be extricated.

"What do you wish of me?" asked the emperor, whose eye never quailed.

"It is too late to ask you anything," rejoined Death's Head. "You know our programme. We want internal reforms, liberation of political prisoners, a liberal constitution; in fact, the abolition of the one-man power. These you have refused to grant."

"I have."

"Accordingly, we, the Nihilists have tried you and found you guilty. We have pronounced sentence."

"Well?"

"Well," ejaculated the Nihilist, "it is a sentence of death, and I am the executioner."

The muscles of the czar's face twitched, and he trembled slightly, but this was all the agitation he displayed.

"When and how do you propose to execute me?" he asked.

"In five minutes I shall plunge this dagger into your heart."

He took out his watch and fixed his eyes on the dial.

The tick, tick of the watch was painfully audible.

Quick as thought the emperor snatched up the pistol, and before the

would-be assassin could divine his purpose, he fired.

Though discharged in a hurry, the bullet was so well aimed, that it struck Death's Head in the right arm, which fell powerless by his side.

The dagger slipped from his palsied grasp and fell to the floor.

With a yell of rage mingled with despair, the wretched man rushed to the window, and throwing himself at the casement, burst through it, dashing the glass on all sides, and fell on the snow beneath.

He was up again in an instant, knowing that his life depended on his speed, and darting amongst the shrubs, disappeared from view.

"Ho, ho! without there, gnards!" roared the emperor.

His coolness and presence of mind had saved his life, but he wanted the Nihilist captured.

In a few moments the officer of the guard, who had been waiting outside, entered the library, followed by half-a-dozen soldiers.

The room was full of smoke, and the czar stood with the pistol in his hand, pointing to the window.

"Quick!" he cried. "An attempt has been made upon my life. I have crippled the assassin by putting a bullet in his arm. He has escaped by the window. Pursue him. You, Soltykoff, will stay with me."

This remark was addressed to the young officer of the guard, who remained behind, while the soldiers jumped out of the window, and dispersed themselves in various directions.

Soltykoff was a young man of noble birth, and belonged to one of the first families in Russia.

He was greatly attached to the czar, whom he regarded as the father of his people, and admired as the emancipator of the serfs.

The emperor leaned on his shoulder.

"I am faint," he remarked. "This excitement has been too much for me."

"Be brave, sire."

"I will; but for a time I held my life in my hands. At what time have I

got to visit the poor in the church of the Holy Apostles?"

"At twelve, your majesty."

"I will retire to my bedroom," said the emperor.

"A little rest will do your majesty good," said the young officer.

"Have they caught the wretch?" asked the emperor.

"Not yet."

"Don't leave me, Soltykoff. My nerves are all unstrung."

Soltykoff promised that he would not quit his majesty's side, and assisted him to leave the room, which, owing to the broken window, was becoming very cold.

The czar threw himself on the bed in his magnificently-appointed chamber.

But he could not sleep.

He started up at intervals, asking if the assassin had been caught.

When at last he heard that the soldiers could not discover any trace of him, he was very much annoyed.

The fear and trembling came upon him again.

"I have a haunting terror of these men," he exclaimed.

"Oh, sire, that is foolish."

"They will kill me some day," said the emperor solemnly.

"Let me beseech your majesty to turn your thoughts in another direction."

"I cannot; but let us go."

The emperor went into another room where his body servants were waiting, and they dressed him in the uniform of the Imperial Guard.

He was about to perform an annual custom.

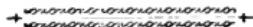
That is to say, he was about to visit the poor who assembled in the church of the Holy Apostles.

Here he blessed them, called them his children, and his grand almoner gave them sums of money.

His sledge was in waiting.

A detachment of Cossacks with their long lances were in attendance, and amid a flourish of trumpets he was driven off.

Soltykoff accompanied him.



THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"YOUR LIFE IS FORFEITED, FOR YOU ARE IN THE PAY OF OUR ENEMIES," CRIED DEATH'S HEAD."



CHAPTER XXXIX.

ONE OF THE POOR.

QUICKSILVER waited for Death's Head until his suspicions became aroused.

He thought he had been taken in.

Nor was he greatly mistaken.

"Quicksey, my boy," he said to himself, "you are not the smart man you thought you were. There is only one thing you have to do, and that is to see the emperor."

This was a good idea.

But how to do it?

He leaned against a tree outside the palace, which was destitute of leaves and looked as bare as a pole.

A few little birds were holding a conversation in its branches, chirping, and, no doubt, talking to themselves.

They seemed to say—

"Hope on, Quicksilver. You'll win in the long run."

"I hope I may," he thought to himself.

It was bitterly cold, and he flapped his arms up and down over his chest to keep himself warm.

Even this did not have the desired effect.

He shivered in his boots.

All at once the gates of the palace opened, and a brilliant cavalcade issued forth.

In the midst of the mounted soldiers was the Emperor of Russia, seated in his sledge.

A poorly-clad man took up a position close to Quicksilver, and watched the procession go by.

"Is that the czar?" asked Quicksilver, as if speaking to himself.

To his surprise the man answered him in his own language.

"That is his imperial majesty," was the reply.

"Ah! You speak English."

"Well, I ought to, seeing that I was in the Crimean War, taken prisoner by the British at the battle of the Alma, and that I have been to America since."

"Indeed! What are you?"

"Only a poor devil of a pedlar at present, more or less out of luck; but

I am going to the church of the Holy Apostles as sure as my name is Kremlin."

"What for?"

"Don't you know?"

"If I did I shouldn't ask."

"The emperor observes an old custom to-day. He visits the poor, speaks to them, and gives them money."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see? I am one of the poor."

Quicksilver understood the situation in a moment.

"I understand, my friend," he replied.

Kremlin looked at him in a strange manner.

"Are you an acrobat?" he asked.

"Not by a long way; but my dear, benighted casual acquaintance, I intended to convey to your mind the fact that I comprehend your meaning, and I will be one of the poor also."

"You?"

"Why not?"

"You are well dressed, and have a fur coat on."

"Empty pockets, Kremlin. I can't afford to be poor and look so too," replied Quicksilver.

Saying this the boy shook Kremlin by the hand and hurried off after the cavalcade, which was fast disappearing in the distance.

The emperor's sledge glided rapidly over the surface of the frozen snow.

In ten minutes, however, Quicksilver had overtaken it, and, running ahead, reached the church first.

He entered and sat down on one of the chairs.

The church of the Holy Apostles was nearly filled with people of the poorest description.

Some of them shivered with the cold, and looked as if they had had nothing to eat for days.

Some again were lame and blind; others suffered from scrofulous diseases, and the assembly was a cross between a workhouse and a hospital.

In a few moments the czar entered,

accompanied by his brilliant staff, their decorations glittering on their breasts.

The organ began to play, a military band assisted, and the choir sang the *Te Deum*.

It was a grand and impressive scene.

After the chaunt was over the emperor walked between each row of seats, speaking first to the one and then to the other, in a kind, paternal manner.

His almoner, with a bag full of silver, followed him, and gave out a rouble or two, or a few kopecks, to each person.

At length the emperor came to the seat on which Quicksilver was sitting.

"What is the cause of your poverty, my boy?" he asked in Russian.

"Please, your majesty, I can only talk English," replied Quicksilver.

"Oh," answered the czar, "you are British. Well, I can speak your language. My daughter is married to your queen's son, the Duke of Edinburgh. What can I do for you?"

"I am a friend of Jack Dashley, who saved your life. He gave me your ring, which I entrusted to a stranger to take to you."

The emperor turned pale.

Recent events were fresh in his memory.

Turning round to one of his officers who was close behind him, he said—

"Take the boy to the palace and see that he is closely guarded."

Quicksilver was instantly seized and carried out of the church.

He was handed over to a couple of Cossacks, and made to walk over the snow to the Winter Palace, where he was confined in a room by himself until the czar returned.

In half-an-hour the emperor, accompanied by Irkontok and Soltykoff, made his appearance, putting an end to his suspense.

"Do you know this English lad?" demanded the czar.

Irkontok regarded him closely.

"No, sire," he replied.

"Has he been searched for concealed weapons?"

"I will search him."

The chief of the police advanced to Quicksilver, and felt in all his pockets, without finding anything.

"Quite safe, your majesty," exclaimed Irkontok.

He had been sent for in a hurry, and at present he only knew that an attempt had been made on the emperor's life, but he was entirely ignorant of the details.

"Now, boy, tell us your story," said the czar. "Conceal nothing. If there is any wrong we can remedy, you can rely upon our sense of justice."

Quicksilver began as follows—

"Please, your majesty, Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor, two Eton boys, came over here to work as clerks at Krackop, Kine and Co's. They were joined by Bill Bragg, a friend of theirs. Jack saved your life and you gave him your ring."

"Yes, I follow you."

"Timor and Ivan carried off Effie, a girl Jack loves, and whom Timor wants to marry. She is in Ivan's house now."

"Ha! are the Duke of Cronstadt and the Prince of Moscow mixed up in it?"

The chief of the police turned pale.

It was his turn to be interested now, for he guessed what was coming.

He determined to play his part well and declare his ignorance of the plot, sacrificing Timor and Ivan rather than incur the emperor's displeasure.

"Timor is at the bottom of it all," said Quicksilver.

"Proceed."

"Timor and Ivan sent Jack a forged letter which looks like Effie's handwriting, asking him to meet her at a certain house. He goes. It is a Nihilist meeting. The police come in, Jack is taken to prison, Timor arrests his two friends, who are also in prison."

"Yes."

"I was Jack's boy, and I came out to him. When I heard he was locked up, I got over the prison wall, found his cell, and he gave me your ring. I met an old man, who said he would tell you my story, and I don't know what he did, but he has stuck to the ring, and I want you to let Jack and the others out."

Quicksilver's story was so simple and straightforward that it carried conviction with it.

The emperor stamped his foot upon the floor.

"This is an infamous plot," he exclaimed, "and I am glad this poor boy has brought it to light."

"Do you believe it, sire?" asked Irkонток.

"Every word of it. Ivan and Timor incurred my displeasure once before. They are not to be trusted. I will not tolerate these intrigues."

"Your majesty shows the wisdom by which you are always guided, and which is the admiration of your subjects," replied the chief of the police.

He saw which side he ought to take at once.

The emperor smiled, for he was fond of flattery.

"Go, my friend, and release these English young men," he exclaimed. "Take them to their hotel, and see that they are not molested."

Irkонток bowed.

"Bring Effie to the palace. She shall be one of the empress's maids of honour; and summon Ivan and Timor to my presence. By Saint Nicholas, they shall be taught to respect my authority; and take this boy to his friends."

Quicksilver was overjoyed.

He sank on one knee, and seizing the emperor's hand, kissed it respectfully.

Irkонток took his arm, and hurried him from the room, leaving the czar alone with Soltykoff.

It was evident that his majesty was very wrath with Ivan and his unamiable nephew Timor.

The storm would soon burst over their heads.

Going downstairs, the czar sought the presence chamber, which was a large apartment having a throne at the upper end.

The walls were adorned with full-length portraits of his ancestors.

Two stoves, kept burning night and day, preserved the temperature at an even heat, which was essential, as his majesty transacted all his business there.

While waiting for the arrival of Ivan and Timor, he received a visit from his chancellor.

"Well, what news?" asked his majesty.

"I have received secret information, sire, that when your brother, the Grand Duke Alexis, who is expected in St. Petersburg from Germany shortly, arrives here, he will be seized by the Nihilists, and conveyed to some cave where they are in hiding."

"With what object?"

"They will write to you, and threaten him with death unless you grant a constitution and liberate all political prisoners."

The czar bit his lip.

It was alarming to hear of the ceaseless activity of the enemies of the state.

"The grand duke must be warned and closely guarded," he said.

"All necessary precautions have been taken, sire," replied the chancellor.

At this moment Irkонток appeared, leading Effie by the hand.

She was very pale, and a look of timidity sat on her face.

"Very pretty. Really charming," muttered the emperor, who was a great admirer of female beauty.

With a graceful curtsey, Effie stood before the great ruler of all the Russias.

"Your majesty has, I am informed, been good enough to send for me," she observed.

"Yes, my child. During your stay in this country, you shall, if it pleases you, be an attendant on the empress. I wish to remove you from the contaminating influence of Ivan, Duke of Cronstadt."

"Can I see Mr. Dashley?" asked Effie.

"With pleasure."

"Many thanks for your majesty's kindness, but—"

She hesitated, and a look of terror crossed her features.

"What, my child? Speak out," said the czar, kindly.

"You will not let Timor come near me?"

"Timor will not trouble you. Soltykoff, have the kindness to conduct this young lady to the empress, and explain that I wish her to be attached to the court."

Soltykoff nodded his head, and, in charge of the young and handsome officer of the guard, she quitted the presence of the czar.

After this episode, the chief of the police brought in, by another door, Ivan and Timor, who seemed greatly alarmed.

Irkонток had not said much to them, but they knew enough to be fully aware that their plans had miscarried.

They stood in considerable danger.

The czar sending for Effie, and his

liberation of Jack and his companions, was an indication that they were in disgrace.

To be in disgrace with the czar meant that they were ruined.

They entered the room with bowed heads, and stood silently before the arbiter of their fate.

His word was law, and they could not appeal against it.

"Duke of Cronstadt and Prince of Moscow," exclaimed the emperor, in his severest tones, "you have incurred our displeasure."

"In what way, your majesty?" asked Ivan.

"Yes, in what way?" queried Timor.

"Do you dare to question me?"

"At least we might know of what we are accused, in order that we may have a chance of defending ourselves," answered Ivan.

"Our honour is attacked," put in Timor.

"You have no honour, or you would not plot against an unoffending youth, whose claim to my gratitude consists in the fact that he saved my life," retorted Alexander II.

"You mean Dashley?"

"I do. But it is beneath our dignity to argue the point with you. We banish you from the Russian dominions for two years, and give you twenty-four hours to leave the country."

Their countenances fell.

"If you are found in Russia after the expiration of that time, you will be imprisoned in a fortress."

This was their sentence, and a heavy one it was too.

Both Ivan and Timor felt it acutely.

"The young lady, Effie, will be taken care of by the empress," added the czar.

Ivan fell on his knees.

"Mercy, sire, mercy!" he pleaded.

Timor savagely bit his lips, and said nothing, though his heart was full of rage and bitterness.

"We have spoken," said the emperor, coldly.

He made a sign to Irkontok, who raised Ivan, and making a sign to Timor, conducted them to the outside of the palace.

Not a word did he speak.

It is dangerous in Russia to speak to a disgraced man who has incurred the displeasure of his sovereign.

Pulling their fur coats tightly about them, uncle and nephew walked along the street in silence for a time.

Timor was the first to break the silence, which was becoming oppressive.

"Confound the luck!" he exclaimed. "It is too bad. Just when we thought that everything was all right."

"Put not thy trust in princes," replied Ivan.

"What shall we do, uncle?"

"Go to Germany, I think. The czar has not taken my estates from me as he did on a former occasion when I offended him, that is one good thing. I can live like a nobleman this time, and not like a gipsy."

"I shall remain here," answered Timor, with determination.

"For what?"

"Revenge. I'll have Effie away from the palace, I'll get square with Jack Dashley, and I'll get even with the emperor himself."

They had stopped while speaking, and were leaning against the railings of a house.

The door had opened softly, and an old man, with a venerable grey beard, had issued forth.

They did not see him, as he was behind them.

"You talk wildly," exclaimed Ivan.

"I mean what I say."

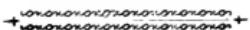
"But how will you do it?"

Timor hesitated, for he scarcely knew what to say in reply.

Suddenly a voice exclaimed in their ears—

"Gentlemen, join the Nihilists, who are the saviours of their country."

Both started, and turned round quickly.



CHAPTER XL.

THE CAVE OF THE CONSPIRATORS.

THEY beheld before them an old man apparently, whose arm was in a sling, as if he had been recently wounded, or had met with a fall.

"Who are you?" asked Ivan.

"First of all let me question you," was the reply.

"That is not unreasonable."

"I have heard your remarks, and you appear to be discontented. If the czar has driven the iron into your souls, I can help you to your revenge."

Ivan and Timor looked at one another.

"Shall we trust him?" asked Timor.

"I am inclined to do so," said his uncle.

"Very well. Speak to him."

"I will do so. My friend, I am the Duke of Cronstadt, and this young man is the Prince of Moscow, two of the proudest titles in the country. We have been disgraced and banished for a trifling offence. Is it not natural that we should feel resentment?"

The old man laughed scornfully.

"The nobles of Russia are like the peasants," he rejoined; "you accept the slavery which the czar offers you, and you hug your chains with which he binds you. Not so I."

"Then you are a conspirator?"

"I am to the backbone, and one of the most unrelenting kind. You may have heard of Count Cracow the Pole."

"Yes," answered Ivan.

"I am he."

The old man folded his arms and smiled proudly.

"Do you know the risk you run in telling us this?" asked Timor.

"Perfectly; but I see that you are discontented. I want to win you over to the revolutionary cause, and together we will soon strike a blow which shall shake Russia to her centre."

"What mean you?"

"The tyrant must die."

There was a pause, during which Timor and Ivan regarded one another uneasily.

"Be not alarmed. Come with me to a secret place, which is alone known to myself and a few devoted followers. I

have a sledge waiting at the corner of the street."

They still hesitated.

"Your answer—yes or no?"

"Yes," cried Timor.

He seized Ivan by the arm, and dragged him along after the old man, who was no other than Death's Head.

This mysterious personage had escaped from the pursuit of the guards who had been sent to scour the garden after him.

He had gone to the house of a friend, where his arm had been bound up and placed in a sling.

It chanced that he came out of the house just in time to hear Timor's remarks, and seeing his opportunity, he grasped it.

The cause stood in need of recruits, and the Nihilists were ever on the lookout to make converts.

Without stopping to think of the gravity of the step they were taking, Ivan and Timor, angry with the czar, their minds filled with resentment, came to a sledge capable of holding four.

The driver, a common-looking Moujick, held the reins in his hand.

"Jump in," exclaimed Death's Head.

They all three took their places, and the driver cracking his long whip, away sped the sledge over the snow.

Neither Ivan nor Timor knew where they were going to.

They had taken a desperate step, and it was too late to draw back, and, moreover, this step was after all in accordance with their inclinations.

They were furiously indignant with the emperor, and both being men of strong passions, they felt that they would risk much to obtain vengeance.

When they quitted the city the road taken by the driver was principally through some dense pine forests.

"Have we far to go?" asked Ivan.

"About a dozen versts," replied Death's Head.

All at once a strange snapping sound was heard: the harness had broken, and the horse fell over on his side.

Death's head sprang up, exclaiming—
“Confusion! What is that?”

“A trace has snapped,” answered the driver; “but I have some rope and will soon fix it.”

“Make haste, in the Virgin's name!”
“Leave it to me,” replied the man.

With a volume of curses the driver made the horse rise, and began to see how the mischief could be remedied.

“A little delay will make no difference,” remarked Ivan.

“No,” laughed Timor. “Our time is our own, and we are likely to have enough of it on our hands for some days to come.”

The Nihilist shook his head.
“There is danger,” he exclaimed.

“Of what kind?”

“These forests swarm with wolves, and at this time of the year the ravening creatures are perished with hunger.”

“True, I had forgotten that; but I have a pistol, I think,” said Ivan.

He felt in his pocket, and a look of dismay came over his face.

“By Heaven! I have left it at home,” he added.

“And I have forgotten mine,” said Timor. “What shall we do?”

The old man smiled, as he lifted up the lid of the seat on which he had been sitting.

He disclosed a dozen pistols, with several boxes of cartridges.

“Help yourselves, gentlemen,” he cried. “We Nihilists never travel without taking a small arsenal with us.”

“Ah, that is good,” replied Ivan, taking a couple, an example which was followed by Timor.

The three men filled the pistols with cartridges, and cocked them ready for action.

It was just as well to be prepared for any emergency that might arise.

The silence of death reigned in that vast snow-clad solitude.

Not a breath of wind disturbed the serenity of the atmosphere, which was quiet as the grave.

Occasionally an oath escaped the Moujick, but these Russian drivers are given to using strong language.

Of a sudden Death's Head put his hand to his ear, as if he was extempore rising a speaking-trumpet.

“Hark!” he whispered.

Neither Timor nor Ivan could hear anything.

“What is it?” asked Timor.

“I fancy I can catch the sharp dog-like bark of a wolf.”

“It is possible.”

The Nihilist jumped from the sledge, and threw himself prone on the earth with an ear to the snow.

It is a well-known acoustic fact that sound travels along the ground.

He remained in this recumbent position for fully half a minute when he got up with an expression of anxiety on his face.

“Well?” ejaculated Ivan.

“A pack of wolves are on our track,” said Death's Head, adding, as he addressed the driver, “Michael, may the deuce fly away with your carcass if you don't make haste!”

“It's nearly done, master.”

“We shall be all undone if it is not.”

In a few minutes more the broken trace was mended, and Michael took his seat as before.

The whip cracked, the Moujick swore, and the startled horse flew over the snow as well as the bad road and unequal nature of the ground would allow him.

Now the sound, which at first was only audible to Death's Head's practised ear, was heard by Ivan and Timor.

It grew louder and louder.

Timor looked over the back of the sledge, and presently saw a pack of about seventy gaunt, hungry, barking wolves coming after them.

On they came at a swinging pace, which the horse, heavily laden as he was, could not equal.

“They're coming,” said Timor.

“Wait till they come near enough, and then drop one,” exclaimed the Nihilist. “We will reserve our fire.”

“What's the use of killing one?”

“You will see.”

In a short time the foremost wolves came within range, and, selecting a big one, Timor fired.

He fell with a short yelp, and rolled over on the snow, which he reddened with his blood.

Instantly the nearest wolves sprang upon him, and began to tear the quivering carcass with their teeth.

They were devouring the body of their dead companion.

Wolves are no respecters of persons.

"On, on, for your life!" shouted Death's Head.

The driver plied the whip with renewed energy, and the wretched horse, already covered with foam, was stimulated to fresh exertions.

It was a race for life and death.

In an incredibly short space of time the dead wolf was eaten up, and the yelping pack continued the pursuit.

Shot after shot was fired until thirty wolves were killed.

Then a misfortune occurred which had not been calculated upon.

The horse was an animal of a certain age, and the pace at which he had been driven, which was one which he had not been accustomed to, affected his heart.

He gave a heart-breaking sob, a wild snort, and, plunging forward, fell down dead.

The party were still four or five versts from their destination.

This distance they would of necessity have to traverse on foot, as it was impossible to obtain any other conveyance in such a wild, sparsely populated country.

"Jump out quickly," said Death's Head.

He assumed the entire command in this emergency, and the others passively obeyed his orders.

A little to the right of them was a fallen tree.

It had been one of the monarchs of the forest, but had at length succumbed to time and the weather.

Perhaps it had been blown down during one of those fearful gales which occasionally sweep over the frozen steppes of the Caucasus, and devastate central and northern Russia.

Its trunk was so large as to come up to a man's waist.

"Get behind the shelter, boys," continued the Nihilist, who had been an old soldier, and was in his element when danger was to the fore.

"A good idea," said Timor.

"We could hold it against a regiment," remarked Ivan.

"Let them eat the horse," exclaimed Death's Head.

"Good again!" Timor replied.

"While they are doing that we can take cool pot shots at them."

The men retreated behind the trunk of the fallen tree.

On came the wolves, seemingly not having had their appetites at all satisfied by the feast they had had.

Their long tongues were hanging out of their mouths.

In a moment they fell upon the horse, and began to eat his body with all the sickening greed of vultures.

Bang, bang, bang!

The pistols were discharged with unerring aim, and the wolves fell as fast as leaves in autumn.

Still those that remained would not quit the carcase.

In a short time it was all over.

The last wolf received his death blow and rolled over on his back with his legs in the air.

"That settles it," said Death's Head.

"We are well out of it," observed Ivan with a shudder.

"By Saint Nicholas, you are right," answered Timor. "I shouldn't like to find my grave in a wolf's stomach."

"Gentlemen," said Death's Head, "we have an hour's brisk walk before us. When we reach our destination I will extend to you all the hospitality in my power, and we can at our leisure talk over our plans."

They started on their weary journey over the frozen snow.

At length, as the sun was setting with a dull, leaden hue, they reached some rocky mounds, closely covered with a thick growth of brushwood.

Pushing this aside, Death's Head followed a well-defined path, which led down a decline to an opening in the side of a rock.

Opposite this was a stone, which he pushed away, disclosing an aperture about two feet wide and four high.

"Enter, my friends!" he exclaimed.

They stepped down, and found themselves in a spacious cavern, which was lighted by oil lamps, suspended by iron chains fixed in the roof.

Half-a-dozen wild-looking, long-haired, bearded men were engaged in talking, drinking vodka, or reading.

An old woman was standing over a charcoal stove, superintending the cooking of a savoury stew.

Its odour pervaded the apartment, and gave out an appetising smell, to which the new-comers were not insensible.

This was the cave of the Nihilists.

It was securely hidden in the recesses of the forest, and no one could be surprised at the secret police having no idea of its existence.

The men crowded round Death's Head, and cordially welcomed him back, asking for the news.

"I have made two attempts at the tyrant's life," replied the Nihilist. "I have failed, and I return with a broken arm, but an undaunted spirit."

These sentiments were loudly applauded.

Seeing that his friends looked curiously at Timor and Ivan, he introduced them.

"The Prince of Moscow and the Duke of Cronstadt," he continued. "They are the two last victims of the czar's caprice, and they have been driven to join us."

"Where is Plevsky?" asked one Nihilist.

"A prisoner!"

"And the others?"

"Dead or captured. We were betrayed."

"By whom?"

"From information I have received it was by Osman."

As this name was mentioned, a man who had been reclining on a rude pallet, stretched on the floor, rose up.

He rubbed his eyes and looked vacantly about him.

"Who called me?" he asked.

Death's Head's eyes flashed, and he stretched out his uninjured arm threateningly.

"Seize that man," he exclaimed. "He is a spy!"

Immediately half-a-dozen hands grasped Osman, and he was secured.

"Bind him," cried Death's Head.

A rope was tied round his wrists, and his hands tied behind him.

"What have I done?" cried Osman, in an agony of terror.

"My information is to be relied upon," replied Death's Head. "I was told that you spoke to Irkontok about our meeting place in Neva Street, and that you occasioned the raid upon us."

"I will swear I did not," said the spy.

"The oaths of traitors are of no avail."

Ivan had overheard this colloquy, and he stepped forward.

"Let me say a word or two which will settle this question," he exclaimed.

"Certainly," was the reply.

"The man is a spy. I can confirm all you say. Since I have joined your band, I must study my own safety, and we can none of us live in security while this fellow continues to exist."

Ivan remembered the ball at his house, when Osman forged the letter from Effie which was to entrap Jack Dashley.

It was Osman who revealed the meeting place of the Nihilists.

"He must die," said Death's Head, in a solemn voice.

The spy was seized with a sudden terror.

His eyes nearly started from his head, and his limbs trembled under him so violently, that he could scarcely stand.

"Spare me!" he said, clasping his hands wildly, "and I will do anything you order me."

"Your life is forfeited, for you are in the pay of our enemies."

"But I have not yet told him of this hiding-place."

"That is because you have not had the chance. Perhaps to-morrow you might have betrayed us."

"Mercy! Mercy!"

Death's Head waved his hand.

"Dig a grave," he exclaimed.

"Must I die?" cried Osman.

"In five minutes. Make your peace with Heaven, if you have any belief, which I strongly doubt."

Osman turned to Timor and Ivan, begging their intercession on his behalf, to which they turned a deaf ear.

He urged that he had been of service to them, he spoke about the letter he had forged in Effie's name, and he begged wildly for his life.

It was dangerous, however, in their present circumstances to allow such a man to live, and they would not listen to him.

Two men went outside the cave, one with a pick-axe, the other with a shovel, and in half-an-hour they had dug a grave.

During this time the fellow's sufferings were terrible.

He completely broke down, grovelling on the floor in abject fear.

"Lead him out," said Death's Head, when the men announced that the grave was ready.

"Who will be the executioner?" asked Timor.

"I!" replied the head Nihilist.

"Just as you like, but it is a job that would just suit me. I have had a little pistol practice at the wolves, and—"

"If you like," said Death's Head.

"Grant me the favour."

"With all the pleasure in the world," answered Death's Head, with a polite bow, such as a Russian gentleman always knows how to make.

A love of blood shedding was innate in Timor's disposition, for he was cruel by nature.

He liked to torment, to hurt, to kill his fellow creatures.

In fact, he had all the wild beast instinct in him, and it would come out whenever it had an opportunity.

When the spy was taken outside and placed near the grave which had been hastily dug, Timor levelled a pistol at him.

"Are you ready to die?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the trembling wretch.

He knew that his last hour had come, and that he had no mercy to expect from those by whom he was surrounded.

The next moment the pistol was discharged.

Osmán staggered and fell.

For a brief space his limbs twitched convulsively, then all was still.

"That's a good job over," remarked Timor carelessly.

"Put him in the grave," said Death's Head.

A couple of Nihilists threw the body of the spy into the hole prepared for it, and hastily shovelled some loose earth upon it, after which all retired to the cave.

It was rapidly growing dark.

In those regions there is no twilight, and day becomes night all at once without any warning.

Scarcely ten minutes elapsed after the conclusion of the tragedy, when the earth in the grave moved, and Osmán got up.

He was ghastly pale, and pressed his hand to his shoulder, from whence blood was flowing.

The shot had entered his body, but had not touched a vital spot, and with innate cunning, he had sufficient presence of mind to sham being dead.

"Ha! ha!" he exclaimed, in a sepulchral tone, "I shall live to baffle all of you, and yet be revenged."

Timor had not been so successful as he had imagined.

With a staggering gait, Osman walked into the forest, not knowing where he was going, but hoping that he might gain some shelter before he sank on the snow through sheer loss of blood.

He tore open his shirt and placed a handkerchief over the wound which had the effect of stopping the bleeding somewhat.

For nearly an hour the wounded wretch crawled rather than walked along, plunging knee deep into the snow, and knocking up against the trees in the darkness.

It was a fight against fate.

At times he felt inclined to give up.

Life, however, is sweet, and he persevered against all obstacles.

At length, he saw a bright red glare, some few yards in front of him, and this gave him renewed courage.

It was evidently a fire.

In a brief space he found himself in the presence of a tall bearded man with unkempt hair, clad in sheepskin.

He was standing by a large wood fire, and near him was a roughly built hut in which he lived.

The man was a charcoal burner.

He cut down the trees, and burning the wood, converted it into charcoal, which was used in his master's house, a few leagues distant.

Seeing Osman, white and bleeding, in the pale rays of the fire, the man crossed himself.

He thought it was some evil spirit.

"Be not alarmed, my friend, I am mortal like yourself!" exclaimed Osman.

"Whence come you?" asked the charcoal burner.

"I have been attacked by robbers, who shot and left me for dead," replied Osman, in a faint and trembling voice.

"Holy Virgin, you have had a narrow escape."

"Give me shelter, and I will reward you," said Osman.

"Let me see the colour of your money first," returned the charcoal burner.

Osman drew from his pocket twenty roubles, which he gave him.

"It's all the thieves left me, and you are welcome to it," he said. "Put me in your hut. Cover me with skins, tie something round my shoulder and give me a plentiful supply of water."

The peasant took the money, and gladly complied with these instructions, which did not cost him much trouble.

Osman was well cared for.

The bleeding stopped, and after drinking a copious draught of water, he fell into a sound slumber, from which he did not wake until late the following morning.

Nature was thoroughly exhausted by what he had gone through.

He awoke somewhat refreshed, but was not strong enough to rise.

The charcoal burner gave him some of his own food, and waited on him with the tenderness of a woman.

Osman was brooding over the venge-

ance he would take upon the Nihilists when he got well.

It seemed so long though, while he was recovering.

In the long weary watches of the silent night, when unable to sleep through pain, the wounded spy thought of what he would do when he got strong again.

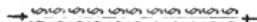
Having a slight knowledge of surgery, he instructed the peasant how to probe for the ball.

After some ineffectual attempts, the man succeeded in tracing the bullet to its resting-place, which was just under the shoulder blade, and finally extracted it.

After this the wound healed rapidly.

In a few weeks Osman was well enough to take leave of the ignorant, but kind and hospitable charcoal burner.

Starting early one morning he reached the high road, and meeting a waggon bound for the capital, induced the driver to give him a lift to St. Petersburg, which city he reached at nightfall.



CHAPTER XLI.

KRAVOSKY.

JACK DASHLEY, Owen Tudor, and Bill Bragg were promptly released from prison by Irkontok.

The chief of the police did not dare to resist the order of the emperor.

He informed them of all that had taken place, as they went back to the hotel.

All were very glad to hear of the disgrace of Timor and Ivan, by whom they hoped most sincerely that they would not again be persecuted.

It was also a source of gratification for Jack to know that Effie had been taken under the powerful protection of the czar.

They were allowed to visit her in the palace, and she frequently called upon them.

Jack determined to give a dinner party, as Bragg was going to leave them, intending to continue his travels.

He invited Effie to come, and she accepted.

All day they were busy arranging about the dishes and the wines.

"I want to do the thing in style, regardless of expense," said Jack.

"Don't put yourself out on my account," said Bragg—"a mutton chop and a potato will do for me. Slap-bang, and all alive, you know."

"I'll do it like a prince, if it costs me a month's salary."

"All right; please yourself."

The servant who waited upon them was called Kravosky.

He had not been long engaged at the hotel, and was an evil-looking fellow about thirty years of age.

The boys had remarked that he had a way of hanging about the room, listening to their conversation, under pretence of arranging articles in various parts of the apartment.

About six o'clock on the day of the dinner, when Jack and Owen had returned after their work at the office, Bragg exclaimed—

"I'm glad you've come."

"Why?" asked Jack.

"That fellow Kravosky has been in and out of the room like a dog at a fair."

"What for?" demanded Jack.

"Asking what time the young lady is expected to leave the palace, so that everything may be ready punctually."

"Hang the fellow! I don't like him at all," said Jack.

"Nor I," replied Owen.

"Those are just my sentiments to a T," continued Bragg. "He's got thief and scoundrel stamped on his face, or I'm very much mistaken."

At this moment Kravosky entered the room with a basket of different wines, which he put on the sideboard.

"When do you expect your company, sir?" he asked, without venturing to meet Jack's eye.

The fellow never could look anybody in the face.

"Miss Vavasour will leave the palace at half-past six, and be driven in a sledge to this hotel," answered Jack.

"Then she will be here in ten minutes from the time she starts," said the waiter, as if talking to himself.

He was evidently calculating the distance.

His eyes glanced to a handsome ormolu clock on the mantel-piece, the hands of which indicated that it was then a quarter-past six.

"Is your clock right, sir?" he asked.

"Of course it is," replied Jack.

"Thank you."

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I want to have everything ready."

Bowing politely, Kravosky quitted the room, his napkin over his arm, and the empty wine basket in his hand.

"I don't like it, Jack," cried Bragg.

"Eh! Don't like what?"

"There is something queer about that man. He isn't what he seems. I'm no fool. Slap-bang, and all alive!"

An uneasy feeling took possession of all three, and they were pained with an undefined sense of coming danger.

"What do you think?" asked Jack.

"Of course I don't want to upset you, but you shall hear my idea," replied Bragg.

"Well? Let's have it."

"I believe that man to be an emissary of Timor's, and that he means no good to our little Effie."

Jack laughed.

"That's absurd," he cried. "I don't think that for a moment. Timor and Ivan have been banished, and are far enough away by this time."

"You are welcome to your own opinion, my boy. Slap-bang, and all alive!" said Bragg. "But I have got half-an-hour before dinner, and I'm blessed if I don't go downstairs and keep an eye on that chap."

"Do so, if you like."

Bragg put on his fur coat and his sealskin cap, after which he went into the hall.

There were a few persons standing about talking, as there always are in Continental and American hotels.

He could, however, see nothing of Kravosky.

After waiting five minutes someone brushed rudely by him, and turning round abruptly, he caught sight of the man's features.

It was the waiter.

A great change had taken place in his appearance, for he had on a thick, flat-topped cap and a heavy pelisse lined with fur.

He might have been taken for an ordinary citizen, or a merchant in a fair way of business.

Though this transformation astonished Bragg, he was still more surprised to see him quit the hotel at the front entrance.

After reflecting a moment, Bragg determined to follow him, as his conduct tended to confirm his suspicions.

He caught sight of Kravosky walking slowly along the street, and taking advantage of the shadows cast by the houses to keep himself hidden as much as possible.

At length he came to a large square, in the centre of which was an equestrian statue on a marble pedestal.

It represented one of the Emperors of Russia who had reigned in days gone by.

All around it streamed the silver moonlight, which fell on the white snow, making it sparkle like crystal.

In the distance was the czar's palace, from which a thousand lights seemed to flash.

Calm, impassive, silent as a sentinel on duty stood Kravosky.

Bill Bragg got on the other side of

the statue, and was close to him without having excited his attention.

What was going to happen?

He scarcely dared to think.

Slowly passed the minutes, which seemed like hours, and so agitated was Bragg that he could hear his own heart beat.

It was the calm before the coming of the storm.

Kravosky peered up the road, straining his eyes until they nearly started from their sockets.

All at once the gates of the palace opened, and a sledge, containing a lady daintily wrapped in costly furs, passed out.

This was Effie Vavasour, who was unattended.

The distance between the palace and the hotel where Jack Dashley lived was so short that it was not deemed necessary to send anyone with her except the driver.

Bragg saw this too, and he held his breath.

Unexpectedly he heard a movement above him, and looking up, saw a small form perched on the back of the horse, behind the bronze figure of the czar.

It did not take him a moment to recognise Quicksilver.

Jack had got him work as an errand boy in the office of the Messrs. Krackop, Kine and Co.

It was about his time for coming home from his daily duties.

That he should be on the back of the horse was not at all surprising, as he was always climbing up somewhere.

Bragg was afraid to speak to him lest he should alarm Kravosky, who had stepped a little way into the road.

The square was deserted.

On came the sledge at a gallop.

When it arrived nearly opposite the statue Kravosky darted forward with the speed of a deer, and drawing a large murderous-looking knife from beneath his cloak, sprang like a wolf on the driver.

Making good his hold with one hand, he employed the other to stab him to the heart.

With a groan the wretched man sank from his seat on to the snow.

Effie saw that something terrible had happened.

The action of her heart seemed to cease, her cheeks became bloodless, and she fainted dead away.

Bill Bragg now comprehended what was going on, and saw why Kravosky had been hiding by the statue.

It was an intended abduction.

"Stop, you villain!" he shouted, running up to the sledge.

The horse, which was a well-trained animal, had stood perfectly still when its driver fell.

Kravosky was gathering up the reins when Bragg approached.

"Fool!" he hissed, between his clenched teeth, "will you rush upon your fate?"

"Come down from there."

Kravosky still held the ensanguined knife in his hand.

With unerring aim he hurled it at Bragg, who received it full in his right breast.

"Oh, heaven! I am killed!" he murmured as he sank back.

Now Kravosky was at liberty to proceed without any further interruption, and urging on the horse with voice and whip, he sped along over the frozen snow.

He took one glance over his shoulder at Effie.

She, poor child, was quiet enough.

With an internal chuckle, Kravosky disappeared round the corner of the next street.

Quicksilver had been an amazed spectator of this exciting scene, which he was quite at a loss to understand.

What did it all mean?

One fact was patent, and that was, that two apparently dead bodies were lying on the snow.

He got off the bronze horse, climbed down with his accustomed agility, and proceeding to the spot, examined the coachman first.

There was no doubt about his condition.

"Dead as mutton!" said Quicksilver. "Now for the other."

He walked over to where Bragg was groaning in great agony, for the pain he suffered was intense.

"Why, bless me," he added, as the moonlight fell on the pale, convulsed, upturned face, looking so ghastly, "it's Mr. Bragg."

The latter heard this remark, being perfectly sensible.

He was tugging hard at the handle of the knife, which he wanted to pull out of the wound.

But he had not the strength.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Quicksilver."

"Thank Heaven for that! Draw this knife out."

"If I do you will bleed to death."

"It hurts so."

Quicksilver was right in refusing to extract the knife, because if he did so a rush of blood would have ensued which might have proved fatal.

His judgment was correct, though he had no knowledge of surgery.

"Get me home, where I can see a doctor," said Bragg.

"That's more like it."

Quicksilver looked excitedly up and down the road, and seeing a drosky coming along at a slow pace, he waved his arms wildly, and shouted loudly to the driver for help!

The drosky drove up, and getting Bragg on his legs, Quicksilver had him placed inside the vehicle and driven to the "Prospect Hotel."

By the aid of a couple of waiters Bragg was taken upstairs.

Great was the surprise of both Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor when they saw his helpless condition, the cadaverous-hue of his face, and the handle of the knife sticking out of his breast.

He sank into an easy-chair, faint and feeble.

His countenance was distorted by agony, and he could not restrain his feelings, which forced bitter, scalding tears down his pallid cheeks.

"Brandy and a doctor," he exclaimed, in a tremulous voice.

"Run for a medical man," said Jack to one of the waiters. "I will give him the spirit."

He poured some brandy into a tumbler and Bragg drank it with avidity.

"Now, how did this happen?" asked Jack.

"I saw it all and could not stop it," answered Bragg.

"Are you well enough to talk?"

"I think so. It was Kravosky. He stopped the sledge, killed the driver,

and ran off with Effie. I got stabbed. It wasn't my fault, Jack."

"Yours? I should think not."

"Don't blame me, dear old boy. Slap-bang, you know, no coward, and all that."

"Not I; but Effie——"

"Has been carried off—I know not where."

The exertion caused by talking, and the heat of the room, caused Bragg to become insensible.

They thought he was dead, and their anxiety was very great until the doctor arrived.

He was well supplied with lint and bandages, but he had the patient conveyed to his bed before he removed the knife.

This operation was performed without difficulty, and though the stab was a serious one, it had not penetrated deep enough to touch a vital part.

The blood was promptly staunched, and a nurse being sent for, Bragg was left in her charge.

Jack and Owen returned to the dining-room; on the table was the dinner, but they had small appetite for it.

After what had happened this was scarcely to be wondered at.

Quicksilver, who was treated by the boys as an equal, dining and spending his evenings with them, gave his account of the affair.

They went through the several courses which were, one after the other, placed upon the table as mournfully as if they were at a funeral.

When they had finished and had lighted their cigarettes, and the coffee had been brought in, they began to talk.

"We have to thank Timor for this," observed Jack, thoughtfully.

"There can be no doubt about that," replied Owen.

"Then it follows that he can't be so far away from St. Petersburg as we all seemed to think."

"Foxes have holes," said Owen.

"I'd like to find out the hole of the Russian fox. If I wouldn't give it him!" cried Jack.

"Don't excite yourself," interrupted Owen; "our turn will come."

"When?"

"Perhaps sooner than you imagine."

Jack leant over the table and buried

his face in his hands, being overcome by his emotion.

He felt the disaster acutely, for he knew that Effie had a terrible time before her.

Timor was of an age to marry, and would stick at nothing to accomplish his purpose.

Owen Tudor went up to Jack and patted him gently on the shoulder in a kindly manner.

"Cheer up, old man," he said.

Jack looked up, and his voice was choked by emotion.

"Don't give way," continued Owen.

"I can't help it," replied Jack.

"We will find her."

"Do you really think so?"

"No fear; we will hunt that rascal Timor down. He has incurred the displeasure of the emperor, and as soon as we find a clue—"

Owen paused, for he saw a man gaunt and ghastly, who looked as if he had suffered much, standing in the doorway.

"And I will help you," exclaimed the man.

They looked at him curiously.

"Who are you?" demanded Jack, rousing himself from his lethargy.

The man stepped into the room.

"Osman, the spy," he answered.

Jack knew his features, and tried to recollect where he had seen him.

"I know you," he said. "Where have I met you?"

"No matter. I want to be your friend. I have seen Timor, Prince of Moscow. I know where he is. I know where Ivan, Duke of Cronstadt is; they have made me their enemy. I have heard of the outrage committed this evening by Kravosky, and I can tell you where Miss Vavasour has been taken."

Jack was completely taken aback.

"Is this a part of the plot?" he asked.

"Heaven forbid," replied Osman. "I may have been bad. I admit I have been paid by the police, but I swear, as I hope for salvation hereafter, that I will serve you faithfully."

"Why?" asked Jack.

"Because I hate Timor."

"Why again?"

"He has done me a great injury—that is enough. Do not ask me too many questions. All that concerns you is that

I am your friend and will help you all I can."

Owen Tudor threw his cigarette in the fire and rose up.

"I like this man and believe in him," he exclaimed.

"But he says he is a spy," answered Jack.

"If he can tell us where Timor is that makes no difference," replied Owen. "No one but Timor would have hired Kravosky to carry Effie off."

Osman put his hand in Jack's.

"Without fee or reward," he said, "I will conduct you to-morrow to the cave of the Nihilists."

"Is Timor one of them?" asked Jack.

"Yes, and Ivan also."

"We ought to see the chief of the police."

"If you accept my offer, we can see him to-morrow. Give me shelter here to-night, and let me have food."

"Food?"

"Yes. I have eaten nothing for two days, and have not a kopeck in my pocket," answered Osman.

Jack was greatly shocked.

He had no idea the man was hungry.

Getting up, he rang the bell and told Osman to order what he wanted, for that there was plenty of everything downstairs.

Osman ordered the waiter to bring him anything he had handy, and when the food arrived he ate like a famished wolf.

When at length his hunger was satisfied he rose from the table with a sigh of relief.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "you must excuse my voracity; but that is the first good meal I have eaten for more than a month."

Jack handed him a cigar, and sinking into a chair, he stretched out his legs before the stove and began to smoke.

At this juncture a domestic entered the room, bearing a card on a silver salver.

Looking at it, Jack said—

"Irkontok."

"The chief of the police!" echoed Owen. "What does he want?"

"Perhaps he has heard of the outrage?"

"Most likely," said Osman.

"Show him up," cried Jack.

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON



"HA! HAS THE BIRD COME TO ITS CAGE AT LAST?" CRIED TIMOR."

In a few moments Irkонток entered the room, and Jack offered him a chair.

" You are not an altogether unexpected visitor," he remarked.

" The dead body of the emperor's coachman, who was driving Miss Vavasour to your hotel, has been found in the square," replied Irkонток.

" I am aware of it."

" What does it mean?"

" Simply that an emissary of Timor's has carried her off."

He related the whole story as well as he knew it from Bragg and Quicksilver, which raised great alarm in the breast of the chief of the police.

If Timor was lurking in the neighbourhood of St. Petersburg the czar would accuse him of being remiss in his duty.

The chief of the police under an autocratic government is supposed to know everything.

" I am puzzled," he observed.

Just then he happened to notice Osman.

" You here?" he added.

" Yes, sir."

" Where have you been all this time?"

" Some time at work; some time ill."

" I sent you to track the Nihilists to their lair."

" And I did so," answered Osman quietly.

" Well?"

" They shot me for my pains; but I recovered by a miracle almost, and am here."

" That I can see with mine own eyes," said Irkонток. " But where are Death's Head and his companions?"

" About twenty versts from St. Petersburg."

" Ha! say you so?"

Irkонток's eyes lighted up with a fierce pleasure which he did not take the trouble to conceal.

His usually impassive countenance was radiant with delight at this unexpected intelligence.

If he could capture or kill Death's Head and his desperate band he was sure of a rich reward from the emperor.

His position would be secured, and he would bask in the sunshine of the czar's favour.

" You must lead us there to-morrow," exclaimed Irkонток. " I will take with me a body of Cossacks and secure the whole gang."

" I want to be with you," remarked Jack.

" Certainly! I see no objection to your coming, and the young lady will be glad to know that you had a hand in her rescue."

Osman struck his hand on the table.

" I had nearly forgotten one thing," he said.

" Name it."

" Death's Head was talking of digging a subterranean passage somewhere, so that if unexpectedly alarmed they could all escape."

" That is embarrassing," replied Irkонток.

" All the more so, because I have not the slightest idea in what direction the rascals are going to burrow," continued Osman.

" Never mind; we will do our best. I must go to the emperor now. It will be news to him that Ivan and Timor have joined the Nihilists, and have dared to abduct one of the empress's attendants. Still, he will be pleased to hear that there is a chance of catching them all like rats in a trap."

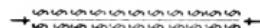
" That is where your chance arrives."

The chief of the police nodded his head and smiled.

Shaking hands with Jack, he told Osman to come to his office early in the morning, when they would make all their preparations for the raid on the cave.

Jack slept better than he had expected that night.

There was a chance of recovering Effie and covering Timor with confusion.



CHAPTER XLII.

EVENTS IN THE CAVE.

AFTER capturing Effie, Kravosky did not relax the speed at which he was driving until he had got well clear of the city.

He feared pursuit.

His attempt had been well planned and well executed so far, and he did not wish to run any risk of failure.

When he had got to a safe distance, he stopped the sledge and got out.

The girl was still insensible.

As she had received no injury he knew that she would soon recover from her swoon, when her fright would be so intense that she would probably shriek aloud, or attempt to throw herself into the road.

Taking a coil of thin rope from his pocket, with which he had carefully provided himself, he tied her securely to her seat.

Then he remounted and drove off again, but at a slower pace than before.

He did not think he should be followed now.

It was fully an hour before Effie came to herself.

She looked around wildly and tried to move, wondering what had happened to her.

It was like a horrid dream or nightmare.

Slowly, as her mind became more evenly balanced, recent events rushed back upon it like a flood.

"Help! help!" she cried.

Her voice died away in mocking echoes among the gloomy pines.

"Keep still," exclaimed Kravosky, "or I'll lash you with my whip."

"Who are you?" gasped Effie.

"Your master."

"Where are you taking me?"

"You'll find out soon enough," was the rough reply.

The girl sighed deeply and resigned herself to her fate.

At daybreak Kravosky drew up before the cave and gave a shrill whistle.

Instantly Timor, who had been on the alert, emerged, for the whole thing was carefully planned.

"Ha, my sweet little Effie," he

exclaimed, grasping her arm; "has the bird come to its cage at last?"

She gave him a look which evinced the most bitter repugnance.

"You!" she said.

"Yes, my child. I could not live without you," he answered. "Ivan and I have joined a jovial band of Nihilists. Among us is a priest. You have only to say the word, and he will make us man and wife."

"Never!" ejaculated Effie boldly.

"We shall see."

"You cannot compel me."

"I don't know so much about that. There is an instrument of torture used in Russia called the knout. It has been employed upon women before now, and we will try it on your tender skin, my dear."

"Brute!" cried Effie in disgust.

"Call me all the uncomplimentary names you like. I will have you knouted if you do not consent to marry me in twenty-four hours."

"Oh, Heaven!" gasped Effie, turning her eyes up to the pale grey sky.

She saw that she had no mercy to expect from this man.

If he had ever had any gentlemanly, humanising instincts he had long ago abandoned them.

Timor assisted her to alight, after which Kravosky placed the horse and sledge in a position where they were safe from observation.

"Come with me," exclaimed Timor, taking her hand.

She dared not disobey him.

He led her into the cave where the Nihilists were, and she saw Ivan talking earnestly to Death's Head.

"I tell you the emperor must die," she heard Death's Head say.

Their conversation was cut short by her appearance with Timor.

"Uncle," said the latter, "the lost sheep has returned to the fold."

"I am happy to hear it," replied Ivan, with a meaning smile.

The Nihilists, who were lying around on their beds of straw, looked up lazily

on hearing voices, and seeing that there was no danger to be apprehended, turned over and went to sleep again.

They were ever watchful.

This was not surprising, for they had their lives in their hands.

Effie was conducted to a seat by Timor, and Kravosky entered.

"These two want some refreshment," remarked Ivan. "What have we got?"

"Cold venison," replied Timor, "and black bread."

"Get it out."

Kravosky placed a small table in front of Effie, while Timor produced the viands, plates, knives, and forks.

Effie was determined to be brave.

She knew her strength would suffer if she did not eat, so she consumed what they gave her.

A glass of wine was then handed to her, which she drank.

"My dear Effie, you look tired," said Timor.

"I should like to rest," she answered.

"You shall do so. To-morrow we will talk of our marriage. Think well over what I have said."

"It is useless," replied Effie.

"You must be mine," hissed Timor.

"I will not."

"We shall see. Kravosky, who is my dear friend, is also a priest, and he can legally perform the marriage ceremony."

Effie looked at him with open eyes.

"That man a priest?" she exclaimed.

"Yes; he had some trouble with his bishop, and became a Nihilist, but he is a priest of the Greek Church for all that."

"Then Heaven help me!" sighed Effie.

Timor stamped his foot on the floor and clapped his hands.

"Ola!" he cried, "ola! Maria!"

The old woman who attended to their wants made her appearance from an inner cavern.

Her grey hair was hanging down over her shoulders, and her eyes were heavy with sleep.

"What is your wish?" she asked.

"Take this lady under your charge. See that she is duly cared for."

"Yes, yes; I understand."

"If she escapes your vigilance your life will not be worth a moment's purchase," added Timor.

The old hag grinned diabolically.

"I'll not close my eyes again," she replied; "and if she gets out of my cave she must be an accomplice of the fiend himself, from whom Heaven protect us."

Seizing her roughly by the arm, she dragged Effie into the inner cave, which contained two straw beds, on one of which she threw her.

"Lay there and go to sleep," she exclaimed.

"Oh, don't hurt me, please," said Effie, whose wrist was bruised by her violence.

"Hush!"

"I will be quiet if you won't hurt me."

"My night's rest is spoilt by you—bad luck to such——"

"Don't, don't blame me. I am miserable enough without that," said Effie, interrupting her.

The woman gave her a slap on the face, and Effie fell back on the straw, crying as if her heart would break.

While this was going on inside the inner cave, Timor, Ivan, and Death's Head were congratulating themselves upon the success of their plans.

Kravosky, exhausted by his hard night's work, had thrown himself upon the hard ground, with his coat as a pillow, and gone off into a heavy slumber.

"Effie is mine at last," said Timor.

"Don't make too sure," replied Death's Head.

"Why not?"

"There's many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip."

"Oh, that's all rubbish," said Timor. "She is here. She cannot get away, and Kravosky is a priest. If she will not consent to be my bride I will have her knouted until she does."

Death's Head did not make any objection.

"You can do as you like," he replied.

"What occupies my mind most," remarked Ivan, "is our attack on the czar."

"Yes, yes," cried the old Nihilist eagerly.

"When shall it take place?"

"In a few days. I am maturing our plans."

"Time is slipping by"

"Leave all to me."

There was a pause, during which the three conspirators refilled their pipes, which had gone out, and lighting them, they smoked in silence.

"I had a bad dream last night," said Ivan, "and it troubles me, although I am not superstitious enough to believe in omens."

"I never dream," replied Death's Head.

"Let me tell you what I saw in my vision."

"With pleasure."

"I fancied that Irkontok surprised me in my sleep, and putting a pair of handcuffs on me, dragged me before the emperor, who ordered me to be immediately executed."

"Nonsense," laughed the Nihilist.

"I was taken to the prison-yard. A file of the guard loaded their muskets, and being blindfolded I knelt down. There was a loud report, and I knew no more; my mind became a blank."

"That is not likely to happen. No one can find us here. Besides, we have our secret mode of exit," replied Death's Head.

"Is that finished?" inquired Ivan.

"My men finished their task this afternoon. Come and look at it."

Taking up a lantern, he led the way to the back of the cave, which narrowed considerably by the side of the inner cavern in which Effie was confined.

A passage had been chopped in the soft, friable sandstone which was wide enough and sufficiently high to allow a man to walk or run through it with ease.

"Where does this lead to?" asked Ivan.

"Into the pine forest."

"Is it long?"

"About three hundred yards. If such an unlikely thing as a surprise were to take place, we could reach the forest in less than no time, and seek another shelter which I have prepared."

"Where is that?"

"I have had built a small wooden house in the top branches of a pine tree, whose dense foliage protects it from observation. Large iron nails driven into the trunk enable one to climb up."

"Bravo!"

"It is supplied with provisions and water sufficient for a month."

"Your ingenuity is inexhaustible," said Ivan, admiringly.

"They have not christened me the Revolutionary Fox for nothing," replied Death's Head, with a complacent smile.

They returned to their seats before the stove and lighted fresh cigarettes.

Timor was too excited to sleep.

Death's Head was full of his plans, and was always satisfied with a couple of hours' rest.

Ivan alone looked tired and jaded.

Death's Head took up a ball of glass, of which there were half-a-dozen on the floor.

He regarded it affectionately.

"Every Sunday the czar drives to church," he said. "One of these hand-grenades, filled with dynamite, will be hurled at him, and the throne will be vacant."

"Is that what you mean to do?" asked Ivan.

"Yes. You will be supplied with one also."

"I?" cried Ivan.

"Certainly, and Kravosky too. We must be prepared at all points. If I fail in blowing the tyrant to atoms, you and others must play your part."

Ivan shook his head.

"I could not do it," he replied. "Much as I have reason to dislike—ay, to hate the emperor, I could not kill him."

"You are faint hearted."

"Possibly."

"What says Timor?" inquired Death's Head.

"I don't mind hearing you talk about it," answered Timor, "but I don't think I should like to run the risk of throwing bombs at the czar in the street."

Death's Head uttered a snarl like a baffled wolf.

"Bah! you are both cowards!" he sneered.

"Those who throw the bombs are sure to be captured," argued Ivan. "It is certain death to those who participate in your scheme."

"What of that?" replied the uncompromising Nihilist. "I am prepared to lay down my life for the good of the cause; why are not you? Think it

over, my sons, and let me hear from you again in a day or two."

This ended the conversation, and all three went off to sleep, both Ivan and Timor feeling somewhat uncomfortable.

They had not previously entertained any idea that Death's Head would want

them to actively aid him in his desperate plot.

They were discontented, and did not mind talking treason.

At the same time they evinced a strong disinclination to play the part of assassins.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE KNOT.

As soon as it was light next morning Timor awoke.

He had not taken his clothes off, and after washing his hands and face in a basin of water, which was nothing more than melted snow, he roused Ivan.

"Come outside, uncle," he exclaimed. "The atmosphere of this place is stifling."

Ivan started up.

"It was the English poet who said that misfortune brings one in contact with strange bedfellows," he replied.

They walked out of the cave and strolled up and down under the pine trees.

The solitude was oppressive.

Not a breath of wind stirred the sombre foliage.

It was freezing hard.

The sun hung like a ball of pale fire in the heavens.

No birds were to be seen or heard, and there was an utter absence of life in the gloomy forest.

"I am getting tired of this kind of life," said Timor.

"So am I," answered Ivan, "and I am afraid we shall get ourselves into greater trouble."

"I do not want to kill the emperor," continued Timor. "Death's Head is desperate; he will do anything. Effie is mine. I will make her marry me to-day."

"So soon?" said Ivan.

"If she refuses she shall feel the knot."

"You would not whip her?"

"Would I not?" cried Timor, all his Tartar blood mounting to his face. "If women will not do as they are told they must be made to do so."

"But it seems to me you are cruel."

"Half measures never succeed with women and children. If you want to rule them you must be firm."

"Well?" ejaculated Ivan.

"To-day Effie will be my bride. Let us leave these people before we compromise ourselves any further."

"Leave them?"

"Why not? They have answered our purpose, and they have got Effie for me. You have money?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Fifty thousand roubles in paper, carefully concealed on my person," replied Ivan.

"Good. That is amply sufficient for all our wants. If I recollect rightly you have a castle in Poland?"

"Right again."

"Why cannot we retire there and live quietly until Death's Head either kills the czar or——"

"Stop," said Ivan, interrupting him. "I like your idea very much, but I think I can improve upon it."

"How?"

"We will leave these Nihilists."

"Yes, yes," replied Timor, eagerly; "that is decidedly the first thing to do."

"And," continued Ivan, "we will hasten to my castle in Poland; but we will write to the emperor and tell him that there is a plot against his life."

"Ah! you would betray Death's Head and his associates?"

"I would betray anybody if it suited my purpose."

Timor had no more conscience than his uncle, and did not seem in the least degree shocked at the gross breach of confidence and base ingratitude.

"Let me see," added Ivan reflectively, "we are five versts from the nearest

village. There is a hotel there at which we can procure a sledge which will take us to the Moscow Railway, a distance of ten versts."

"I see you know your geography."

"It is necessary to know everything which may be of use to you."

"What then?"

"At the end of this avenue of pines is the main road," replied Ivan.

"I am aware of it."

"In four hours' time, I will be there in a sledge waiting for you and Effie; if you are not there I shall drive back to the inn at the village and wait for you, because I shall have come to the conclusion that you have not had time to whip her sufficiently to make her comply with your wishes."

Timor held out his hand.

"My dear uncle," he exclaimed, "you are a greater genius than I have always imagined you to be."

"Bah! If a man has a head he ought to know how to use it."

"Then you will not return to the cave?"

"Decidedly not."

"What shall I say to Death's Head? It will not do to let him have any inkling of our designs."

"That would be ruinous. Tell them I want exercise, and have gone out wolf-hunting. Make any excuse you like. Good-bye, boy."

"Don't say that."

"Why?"

"It seems as if we were taking leave of one another for ever," replied Timor.

"Shall I say *sans adieu*, in the French fashion, or 'stroll on' in the English style?"

Timor laughed, and declared that it did not matter, after which they shook hands and separated.

Ivan proceeded towards the village, and Timor returned to the cave to commence his campaign against Effie.

The Nihilists were breakfasting.

Timor sat down with them, ate some cold meat and bread, drank a cup of coffee, and then sought the inner cave.

Effie had already breakfasted, and looked better after the sleep she had enjoyed.

It is true that her sleep was broken; she had been troubled with bad dreams, for she had a haunting terror of Timor.

She shuddered visibly as he entered the room.

"Good morning," he exclaimed; "Have you thought over what I said to you yesterday?"

"I have," she rejoined firmly.

"Your answer?"

"Is what you might expect it to be, a decided negative."

"You refuse to become my wife?"

"I do," replied Effie firmly.

"Very well, we shall see."

He went to the threshold and called Kravosky, who immediately replied in person to his summons.

"What is your pleasure, sir?" he demanded.

"Since you were a priest I believe you have been an executioner's assistant?"

"That was at Moscow."

"Never mind where it was. Am I correct in my supposition?"

"You are."

"Can you use the knont?"

Kravosky smiled with a kind of professional pride.

"There are some languishing in dungeons with scarred backs who could give me a character for that," he replied.

"Have you a knout with you?"

"Yes."

"Go and fetch it," exclaimed Timor.

Kravosky vanished, and was gone about a minute when he returned with a long thong-like whip attached to a small wooden handle.

Effie gave utterance to a cry of terror. Kravosky shook the whip maliciously.

"This is the best I have, sir," he exclaimed. "It would not kill anyone under fifty blows, but it will punish severely, I warrant."

"It will do," said Timor.

Timor directed his gaze towards Effie.

"This man is priest and executioner as well," he exclaimed. "He can either marry us or whip you until you consent or faint under the lash. Take your choice."

"I will not marry you," answered Effie.

"Very well."

There was a staple driven into the rock. Seizing the girl rudely, he dragged her up to it, and tied her hands in the iron bolt, so that she stood on her toes and could not move.

"Strip her," he said to the attendant. The old hag grinned as if she were performing a congenial task.

"Oh, Timor, have mercy!" sobbed Effie, as the dreadful fact that she was really to be tortured burst upon her.

"Your fate is in your own hands," he replied. "Will you marry me?"

"I cannot, for I love Jack of Eton."

Timor gnashed his teeth with rage.

"Always that accursed name," he muttered.

"Spare me, as you are a man."

"No, no."

"You will be sorry for this some day."

"Never! Kravosky, flog this girl. We will make her listen to reason."

Kravosky took up a position some distance off, so as to obtain a good purchase on the knout, and swung it in the air.

The next moment it descended with a dull thud upon the back of the defenceless girl.

She uttered a piercing shriek, which rang through the cavern.

"Again, again!" said Timor, relentlessly.

A second and a third time the cruel knout fell upon her shoulders.

"Oh, heaven! I cannot bear this," shrieked Effie in agony.

"Consent," cried Timor, "and he shall leave off."

"I have spoken," she rejoined. "Kill me if you like. It would be a charity."

The poor girl wanted to be put out of her misery.

At this crisis a shot was heard outside, and loud shouts, followed by a trampling of feet, were audible.

Kravosky lowered his knout and stood irresolute.

"What is that?" demanded Timor, terror stricken.

"An attack I fear," rejoined Kravosky.

"We cannot be surprised."

More shots were heard in the outer cave, and it was evident that some hot work was going on.

Timor became pale as death.

A few moments of terrible suspense ensued, during which neither Timor nor Kravosky attempted to escape.

Had they done so it would have been useless, for the outer cave was filled with armed men.

Jack Dashley had arrived with Irkontok,

accompanied by a detachment of Cossacks.

The sentries outside had been shot. This was the first sound of firing which had been heard.

Some of the Nihilists had been killed in the cave, so sudden was the attack; but Death's Head and the majority had escaped by means of the subterranean passage.

Jack on entering the cave had lighted a torch and was seeking for Effie.

At length he espied the entrance to the inner cave and rushed in.

"This way, my lads," he cried.

Half-a-dozen Cossacks followed him, and he rushed in, but stopped short on seeing a sight which made his blood boil.

Effie, his loved darling, was tied up to the wall.

He comprehended the whole scene in a moment.

"You villain! Is this how you treat women?" he exclaimed.

Timor hung down his head and made no answer.

"Seize him!" continued Jack.

Two stalwart Cossacks grasped Timor by each arm and held it firmly.

In an instant Jack cut the cords which held Effie to the wall.

"My poor deardarling," he murmured, as he placed her on a chair.

Effie began to sob bitterly.

Her nervous system was altogether upset, and she was hysterical.

"Cheer up, dearest," added Jack. "It is all over now."

"Thank heaven, dear, you have come," she replied.

He led her into the outer cave, and gave her in charge of Irkontok, who was wondering where the conspirators could have gone to.

"Mind her," he said.

"She will be safe enough; but where have the demons got to?" asked the chief of the police.

"I have secured Timor," said Jack.

"That is one thing; but, confound it, I am baffled. They must have a secret passage."

Effie raised her eyes to Jack.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Not far away," he replied.

"Do not leave me."

"Only for a moment, sweetest. You

must not witness what is going to take place."

"What is it?"

"Timor must be punished."

The look which accompanied these words revealed all to Effie.

"Do as you like," she replied. "He is too wicked for me to intercede for him. Oh, Jack, I am heart-broken. Think of the shame of being whipped as I was."

Jack uttered a growl like a wild beast.

He was burning with a fierce thirst for vengeance, and he meant to have it.

Of a sudden, Osman, who had guided the party of Cossacks to the cave, uttered an exclamation.

"I have found the vent hole," he said.

"Where?" asked Irkoutok.

"Here, on the right."

"Follow them up. I will stay with the young lady."

"After me, boys," cried Osman.

The Cossacks hastily followed the spy, who, being well acquainted with the construction of the cave, had easily found out the mode by which the Nihilists had escaped.

But they had a good start.

That indeed was all they wanted.

Osman, torch in hand, speedily disappeared in the tunnel, followed by the Cossacks, who were armed to the teeth.

Going back to the inner cave, Jack took up some rope, which he passed through the staple.

"Bring him here," he said.

The Cossacks dragged Timor to him, the wretched young man looking more dead than alive.

He well knew the fate that was in store for him.

Also he was well aware that he richly deserved it; still it was very galling to think that he was to be scourged like a dog before the eyes of his enemy.

Not a word of supplication did he utter.

His pride would not allow him to plead to Jack, besides which he felt that any prayer he might make would be disregarded.

With his own hands Jack fastened Timor's wrists to the iron bolt and deliberately removed his clothes, even to his shirt.

He had nothing left on him but his trousers, socks, and boots.

"Now, you fellow," he exclaimed—"you knouter of women, display your skill upon this coward."

Kravosky was always ready to obey orders, and he determined to apply the lash with all his strength in the hope of finding favour in Jack's eyes.

"How many shall I give him, sir?" he asked.

"Knout him within an inch of his life."

"I can kill him if you wish it."

"No, he will have more misery in living."

"You had better feel his pulse, sir, occasionally."

"Why?" demanded Jack.

"They sometimes goes off very suddenly under the knout," answered Kravosky.

"Go on with your work," exclaimed Jack.

Kravosky took up his position again, and, swinging his whip, allowed it to descend on the victim's back.

Monotonously, with the regularity of clockwork, or the steady sweep of a faiil, he continued the punishment.

Timor uttered low groans and moans as the flesh began to fall in strips from his shoulders.

He was streaming with blood.

He felt at each stroke as if he was being seared with a red-hot iron, and his head ached as if a hammer was beating it.

At last he broke down utterly, his fortitude gave way, and he shrieked for mercy like a girl.

He felt that he was being marked for life.

Those terrible searing cuts would never be eradicated from his back.

The tables were turned with a vengeance.

All at once, when Kravosky, who counted each stroke, had said in a stony voice, "Thirty," Timor had ceased to yell.

His head fell upon his breast, and he was still.

"Stop," cried Jack, holding up his hand.

Kravosky desisted from the infliction of further punishment in obedience to this command.

Timor had fainted under the lash. Jack felt his pulse, which was beating feebly, and saw with satisfaction that he was not dead.

He cut him loose, and laid him on some straw.

The Cossacks had looked on stolidly, for such a scene was nothing new to them.

"See that he is attended to, and guard him closely as well as this fellow," said Jack.

The Cossacks saluted in military style, and he went to see after Effie.

It was his hour of triumph.

No wonder he felt elated at his victory, which was now more complete than he had ventured to hope it would be.

Effie was reclining on a rude bed made up of hay and rushes, feeling very ill after what she had gone through.

Irkontok was kneeling by her side, urging her to take some brandy, of which they had found a good store in the cave.

The horrid shrieks of Timor when under the knout still rang in her ears.

"Oh, Jack, is he dead?" she asked, as he came up.

"Not more than half."

"I am glad of that. It is well to forgive one's enemies."

"It takes a good deal to kill a Kalmuc Tartar like Timor," said Jack. "Drink that brandy Irkонток is offering you. It will strengthen you."

She drank it and sank back.

"I can go to sleep now," she murmured.

Jack smoothed her forehead and her beautiful glossy hair—black and shining as a raven's wing.

Soon she fell into a placid slumber, like a little child tired out with its day's play sinking to rest.

Then Jack rose, and he and Irkонток walked out into the open air.

"I am afraid Death's Head and the gang have escaped," remarked the chief of the police.

"But getting Effie back, and capturing Timor and Kravosky, is important; besides, we have killed five of the villains."

He pointed to five dead bodies which had been dragged out of the cave and laid on the snow.

"One of them is a fellow of ours," corrected Irkонток.

"Say four, then; that is something."

"Confound that man, Death's Head, or, to give him his right name, Count Craeow; he always contrives to escape."

Just then Osman, with the Cossacks who had started in pursuit of the fugitive Nihilists, arrived.

"What news?" demanded the chief of the police.

"We can find no trace of them, excellency," answered Osman.

"Could you not track them on the snow?"

"It is frozen too hard for them to leave any tracks on the surface."

Irkонток turned to Jack with a look of perplexity on his face.

"I am utterly at a loss what to do," he exclaimed. "These men cannot be far off; they must be in hiding somewhere."

"It is impossible for me to advise you," Jack rejoined. "Your experience is so much greater than mine that you must exercise your own judgment."

While the chief of the police was debating the question in his mind, the sound of sledge bells was heard.

In the distance a sledge was seen.

Putting a field-glass to his eye, Irkонток reconnoitred.

"By heaven, it is a courier of the czar," he cried.

"Perhaps he is looking for us," suggested Jack.

One of the Cossacks carried a horn slung round his shoulders, which was intended for the purpose of rousing the neighbourhood if the party lost their way.

"Sound your horn," exclaimed Irkонток.

The man did so, and as the sonorous notes died away in the distance, raising a thousand weird echoes, the driver of the sledge turned his horse's head in the direction of the cave.

When he reined in his panting steed Irkонток recognised him in a moment as Soltykoff, the favourite aide-de-camp of the czar.

"Well met," he exclaimed.

"I thought I should never find you," replied Soltykoff.

"Yet I left a plan, prepared by Osman, stating precisely the direction in which we were going."

"It is easy enough to get lost in these pine forests."

"That is true."

"I cannot stay a moment," added Soltykoff. "The Grand Duke Alexis is coming this way. I have to meet him. It is feared that the Nihilists have a plot to capture him and hold him as a hostage. But here are despatches from the emperor addressed to Mr. Dashley."

He produced a bulky document from his pocket and handed it to Jack, who bowed low in recognition of the honour.

"Why were they not sent to me?" asked Irkонток, a little piqued.

"Why I cannot tell. By the way, what have you done?"

"Killed a few of the Nihilists and captured Kravosky and Timor. The Lady Effie is rescued, but Count Cracow and the rest of the gang have escaped."

"That is better than nothing. The czar will be glad to hear it. Good-bye. I must away to meet the grand duke and warn him of his danger."

So saying, Soltykoff shook hands with Jack and Irkонток, and jumping into the sledge, drove off at a rapid pace.

He was soon lost to sight in the distance.

Without any delay, Jack opened the papers with which the emperor had favoured him, and read them aloud to Irkонток.

The drift of them was that private information had been received at court to the effect that Death's Head was intending to capture the grand duke, brother of the czar, then on his way to St. Petersburg.

If Death's Head was not caught, Jack and Irkонток were on no account to leave the forest, but to search in all directions for him.

"That decides my course of action," remarked the chief of the police.

"Yes," replied Jack, "we must stay here."

"I'm not at all sorry," said Irkонток.

"Why so?"

"It gives me a chance of breaking up this desperate gang, of which Death's Head is the soul."

"True," said Jack. "There will be no sense of security to the czar, nor in fact to anybody, until he is dead."

Irkонток went to the Cossacks and gave them special orders how to search

the woods and what kind of a guard to keep up.

Those who had fallen in the attack were buried.

After this the chief of the police himself went out into the forest to search for the escaped Nihilists.

Jack also made investigations.

Thus the day passed.

All their efforts, however, resulted in nothing, and the only good thing which was done was accomplished by Jack, who, with his rifle, succeeded in shooting a fine deer.

This gave them an ample supply of fresh meat.

Effie slept all day, and when she woke up was too weak and ill to rise from her couch.

She was well attended to, and ate a little.

Timor was in a feverish condition, and groaned deeply with the pain of his wounds, which gradually stiffened.

The deer was roasted outside the cave before a huge fire.

Jack superintended the cooking.

While he was thus engaged a voice was heard calling—

"Jack—where's Jack Dashley?"

"Haloo-o-o!" replied Jack, loudly.

Guided by the voice, a form appeared from amongst the trees, and to his very great surprise Jack recognised Owen Tudor.

He looked travel stained and considerably worn out, as if he had had a hard time of it.

"Why, Owen," said Jack, "where did you spring from?"

They shook hands cordially.

"I missed you and thought you might be in danger, so I got leave from Krackop Kine and came after you," answered Owen.

"How in the world did you find me out?"

"I can scarcely tell. You gave me a description from what Osman said about the place, and I am here, cold, weary, hungry. Had a fight with wolves, lost myself several times, fell into a hole and nearly got smothered in snow. Had a hard time of it, I can tell you; but I wasn't going to see you left alone."

"Thanks, old boy. I admire your sentiments."

"Aren't we chums?" said Owen.

"Of course we are, and always have been and always will be."

"Aren't we in a foreign country?"

"Yes," said Jack.

"Didn't we ought to stick together?"

"That's the idea. Put it here again, lad," cried Jack.

He extended his hand a second time, and their palms met in a cordial grasp.

It was quite affecting to see two young men have such a strong regard for each other.

Owen would have died for Jack had it been necessary, so would Jack for Owen.

"Come in and feed; also take liquid refreshment," exclaimed Jack.

"Thank you, I will."

"I will show you the hospitality of the wilds."

Jack took him inside, gave him some vodka, not a bad kind of spirit, which warmed him, and a few minutes after the venison was pronounced ready.

First of all, Jack, Owen, and Irkontok satisfied their appetites, which were made keen by the frosty air.

Secondly, Jack saw that Effie was provided for, and thirdly, the Cossacks were allowed to eat, after which the prisoners were fed.

"Now, old boy," exclaimed Owen, "tell me all that has happened."

In a few words Jack did so.

"Bragg was right about Kravosky," remarked Owen Tudor. "He always said he was a villain."

"Would you like to see Timor?"

"Hardly," said Owen.

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. It would seem like gloating over a fallen enemy. Of course you did quite right to knout him, I think, under the circumstances, I

should have had him shot. But to look at him now might be Russian but it wouldn't be English."

"Perhaps you are right," replied Jack.

Owen rolled a cigarette and handed it to Jack.

"Smoke?"

"Like a fish," replied Jack.

"What a queer simile."

"Shall I say like a chimney?"

"That's more like it."

"Come inside and have a chat with little Effie. She's awfully sick, but I know she would like to see you," said Jack.

Owen accompanied him, and they found Effie propped up on one of the Cossack's great coats, eating her dinner, while the soldier kindly held her plate.

"Well, Effie, how are you?" asked Owen.

"Oh, is it you, Owen? How pleased I am to see you," answered Effie.

"Do you feel any better?"

"Yes, ever so much. But my nerves are quite shattered, and I feel sore all over from the beating Timor gave me."

"The beast!" cried Owen, fiercely.

"Yes; that is all we can call him."

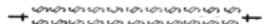
"He's got it, though, and the emperor will send him to the mines."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly; he will be a slave in Siberia. You can gamble your last roule on that," rejoined Jack.

After some further conversation, Effie fell asleep again, and both Owen and Jack, who were exhausted by recent events, followed her example.

Irkontok posted guards outside, and when darkness fell upon the cave, all was wrapped in a sound slumber.



CHAPTER XLIV.

IN THE NIGHT.

WHEN Death's Head and his confederates made their escape through the secret passage they hurried over the snow.

The tree in which they had built their hiding-place was not more than a quarter of a mile off.

Running with the fleetness of deer,

they climbed up the tree with the nimbleness of squirrels, and were at once safely concealed.

The dense black foliage of the pine effectually concealed their little house, which had been carefully built of planks nailed to the branches.

They had no fire, and did not dare to

think of lighting one, for the smoke would have betrayed them.

This made them suffer from the cold, which, however, their thick fur coats partially protected them from.

Their food was in tins, and they had plenty of water in small kegs, so that they were in no immediate fear of starvation.

Several times during the day the Cossacks passed close by the tree, but were unable to see them.

Death's Head was calm, cool, and collected as usual.

The raid on the cave did not seem to trouble him much.

Since Kravosky was captured, the Nihilist next in his confidence was a young man of prepossessing appearance named Ural.

He had been a student in the university of St. Petersburg, but, fired by what he considered his country's wrongs, he had, in a fit of patriotism, joined the Nihilists.

In fact, he was only a boy.

Yet he had the heart of a strong man who could dare and do.

He belonged to a good family in St. Petersburg, and was the idol of his mother, while at the same time he was the pet of his father.

Ural, young, enthusiastic, romantic, had thrown himself away for an idea—for a conspiracy which had assassination for its object, and was wholly lost to society.

Yet he had the courage of his convictions.

"Ural," said Death's Head, "I received a letter yesterday from one of our agents in the west."

"About what?" asked the young man.

"The Grand Duke of Alexis will pass this way shortly. I have long thought of capturing him and holding him as a hostage."

"Is he not the favourite brother of the czar?"

"He is."

"Then it is a good idea. Do you know the route he will take?"

"I do."

"Let us capture him, by all means," said Ural. "You can rely upon me."

"I know it," replied Death's Head,

who always inspired a peculiar confidence in all his associates. "But—"

"Ha! there is an obstacle?"

Death's Head had paused abruptly.

"Not exactly an obstacle," he answered. "But there is something to be done before we get the grand duke into our power."

"Something to be done?" repeated Ural.

"Yes."

"I never desert a friend in need," said Death's Head. "Timor and Kravosky are captured. We must rescue them."

"Are they not on their way to St. Petersburg?"

"No. I have sent a scout to investigate. He says that Ivan is safe somewhere. The chief of the police remains at the cave."

"How will you do it?" asked Ural.

"I will risk my life this night. If I fail, Ural, to you I bequeath my mission."

"To me!"

"Yes, my dear boy; and I feel sure that my mantle could not descend on worthier shoulders," answered the old man solemnly.

"You do me too much honour."

"This is a sacred mission. If I die, it will rest with you to regenerate our unhappy country, and I feel sure that your whole heart and soul are in the cause. Kneel."

Ural knelt down on the rough boarding in the presence of the few melancholy, bearded Nihilists who were left.

"Swear that you will never rest until you have rid Russia of an accursed tyrant," continued Death's Head.

"I swear!" responded Ural.

"Good. If I do not return with Timor and Kravosky before daybreak, you will know that I have fallen into the hands of the Cossacks."

"And then?" asked Ural inquiringly.

"It will be for you to waylay the grand duke, and to afterwards throw the bombs which are to kill the emperor."

"I understand!"

Death's Head pressed his hand affectionately; he even bent down, threw his arms around his neck and kissed his forehead.

"I am content," he muttered.

Without another word, he descended

the tree, and reaching the ground, disappeared from view just as the sun was beginning to set on the verge of the western horizon.

For a long time he wandered up and down the deep glades of the forest immersed in thought.

He was revolving mighty ideas in his brain, for he really thought that his mission was to regenerate his country.

The man was a fanatic and an enthusiast.

However mistaken his ideas undoubtedly were, we must give him the credit of being sincere, and also being ready to sacrifice his life for his opinions.

His creed was a bad one.

Perhaps the iron had entered his soul when a prisoner for a political offence in Siberia.

One fact must be admitted, and that is that his country was woefully misgoverned, and cruel injustices were perpetrated every day.

The blood of the people cried aloud for reform and redress.

When it was about ten o'clock, the fever of excitement from which he had been suffering calmed down, and he went towards the secret entrance to the cave.

Irkontok, with all his cunning, had forgotten to guard this.

He had two men with loaded rifles walking up and down in front, but he did not seem to apprehend any approach from the rear.

In the inner cave, where Timor and Kravosky were, he had placed a sentinel.

Death's Head walked along the passage with a sharp-bladed knife concealed under the sleeve of his sheepskin coat.

He came to the first cave, and saw by the light of the lamp that everyone was soundly sleeping, and that neither of the men he was in search of were there.

Falling on his hands and knees, he crawled to the inner cave.

The sentinel was leaning against the wall, gently dozing, for he, like the rest of the party, was exhausted, not having had any sleep for twenty-four hours.

Still crawling like a snake, scarcely breathing, Death's Head reached the man.

In one corner Timor was lying, in another Kravosky.

Rising up, Death's Head seized the sentry by the throat, tightly compressing his windpipe, and plunged his knife into his heart.

The man could not utter a cry.

Not a sound was heard for fully five minutes, at the expiration of which time Death's Head felt satisfied the Cossack was dead.

He let the body fall gently to the ground.

Then he crawled as before to where Timor was lying writhing in pain.

"Timor!" he whispered.

"Who calls?" asked Timor.

"Hush!" replied the Nihilist, putting his lips close to his ear. "Not a word. I am here to save you."

Timor raised himself up on his elbow, and a groan escaped him.

"I am so stiff and sore. They have knotted me," he said.

"Speak low!" hissed Death's Head.

"I will."

"We hold our lives in our hands now."

"How did you get here?"

"Ask no questions. We cannot talk now. Get ready to follow me. Be satisfied to understand that I never desert a friend in distress."

Timor got up and stood trembling in the uncertain light, while the Nihilist went over to Kravosky, who was in a sound slumber.

He tickled his ear gently.

Kravosky scratched it.

Again he tickled his ear.

"Confound them!" muttered Kravosky, waking up.

His eyes opened, and he saw the familiar features of his trusted leader.

"Is it a dream?" he asked.

"Keep quiet and follow me," answered Death's Head.

So accustomed was he to do all that the great Nihilist told him, that he rose in a moment without asking any questions.

"Crawl and make no noise," said Death's Head.

"But the sentry?"

"He has gone to his last account."

"Good!"

Timor, Kravosky, and Death's Head now prepared to get out of the cave, which was not a difficult undertaking, as everyone in it was asleep.

They crawled into the outer cave and gained the entrance to the secret passage.

Suddenly Effie woke up.

"Jack, Jack!" she cried.

In an instant he was awake and by her side.

"What is it, my darling?" he asked.

"I have had a bad dream," she replied.

"What about?"

"I thought a snake had crawled into the cave and was coiling itself around you."

Jack laughed lightly.

"What nonsense, dearest; there are no snakes here," he answered.

The Nihilists were crouching in a dark corner afraid to move.

"Oh! do stay by me, I am so frightened!"

"Certainly, my love. I will sit up till you go to sleep."

"You will think me foolish," she said.

"No, Effie, I will not, because your nerves are unsettled after what you have gone through."

She put out her hand, which he immediately clasped in his.

The Nihilists did not dare to move.

It was a time of awful suspense for them.

For a brief space the conspirators were in the utmost danger of discovery.

They scarcely dared to breathe.

After a time, however, Jack, seeing that Effie had gone off to sleep again, retired to his own rude couch.

Death's Head waited until his heavy breathing showed that he was in the arms of the drowsy god.

Then he moved on towards the secret passage, closely followed by Timor and Kravosky.

They effected their escape without any interruption, and gained the tree, up which Timor was assisted by his companions.

Death's Head had been tortured by the knout himself, so had Kravosky, and also Ural.

This experience enabled them to know what was best to apply to the wounds, and they rubbed Timor's back with a mixture of tallow and some essential oil, which gave him immediate relief.

His groaning stopped, and he fell off into a quiet, refreshing slumber.

Early next morning Irkontok was awake, and went into the inner cave to see if Timor's wounds had produced inflammation.

He did not want him to die.

What was his surprise to see the apartment vacant, and the corpse of the Cossack on guard lying on the floor.

It was clear that a rescue had been attempted and successfully carried out during the night.

The chief of the police was furious.

He at once raised the alarm, rousing every one, and was promptly joined by Jack and Owen, who inquired the cause of the disturbance.

"Timor and Kravosky have escaped," said Irkontok.

"Impossible," replied Jack, in dismay.

"The guard is murdered."

"They could not have done it themselves," remarked Owen.

"No, no; it is those accursed Nihilists, who cannot be far off."

"But how could they have passed the sentry?" asked Jack.

The sentry was called in and closely questioned.

He declared that he had not moved from his post or closed his eyes all night long, and that no one had passed him.

The fellow bore an excellent character, and there was not the slightest reason to doubt his word.

"Ha!" cried Irkontok; "the secret passage."

"Yes; that it is," answered Jack and Owen in a breath.

The chief of the police struck his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"I thought myself a clever man," he continued, "but I am everlastingly disgraced. Fancy me omitting to guard that passage! Death's Head, who is as cunning as the fiend, has rescued his companions."

Jack smiled confidently.

"Don't be cast down," he exclaimed; "all men are liable to make mistakes. We must find them again, that's all."

"But where?"

"That remains to be seen."

"I am nearly distracted. If we do not find Timor the emperor may dismiss me from my post."

THE SCHOOLDAYS OF JACK AT ETON.



"WEE YOU VILLAIN! IS THIS HOW YOU TREAT WOMEN ? CRIED JACK."

"We will find him. Owen and I will start out. I fancy that Timor's back was still bleeding."

"That is an idea."

"If not, the exertion of walking would open the wounds, and drops of blood on the snow are easily seen."

The chief of the police regarded Jack with an admiring glance.

"My dear sir," he said, "you ought to have belonged to my profession."

"Why?"

"Because of your detective talent."

"Leave all to me," replied Jack. "Owen and I will just punish a couple of venison steaks, and then get on the track."

They had their breakfast, which they washed down with some hot coffee, and went outside to smoke their cigarettes.

The sentry had his gun at his shoulder and was levelling it at some object in one of the neighbouring pine trees.

Again and again he took aim, but the object, whatever it was, went from bough to bough so quickly that he never got an opportunity to pull the trigger.

"Confound the thing!" muttered the Cossack.

"What is it?" demanded Jack.

"May I be hanged if I know, but I think it's a monkey."

"That cannot be."

"Why?"

"Monkeys don't grow wild in Russia. You have not properly studied your natural history."

"But," said the sentry, scratching his head in a puzzled manner, "it may have escaped from some caravan. They have wild beast shows at the fair of Nidjni Novgorod."

"Wrong again," replied Jack. "An animal of the ape tribe is used to a hot climate, and could not exist in this cold atmosphere."

"What the deuce is it, then?"

"That is the problem to be solved. Don't shoot. I will go under the tree."

The soldier lowered his gun.

"There it is again," he cried.

"Where?" asked Jack.

"It's coming down."

Jack ran up to the tree, and had scarcely got under its branches, when something jumped down, alighting on his shoulders.

It caused him to fall to the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed someone in an elfish manner.

Getting up Jack saw Quicksilver, who was grinning all over his face.

"What, you here?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Master Jack," replied the boy.

"You imp! Confound you! don't do that again. My back aches."

"I'm very sorry," said Quicksilver.

"How did you get here?"

"I made inquiries and tramped it. I wasn't sure of the place after all, so I got into a tree."

"You always do."

"That fellow," continued Quicksilver, pointing to the Cossack, "nearly potted me. He would have done it if I hadn't dodged."

"Well, I'm glad to see you," said Jack. "Come inside."

"I want some grub and a warm up."

"You shall have it."

Jack took him into the cave and introduced him to Irkontok, after which the boy ate a big breakfast, for he was nearly starved.

While he was gratifying his appetite, Jack related all that had happened, and stated that he was going with Owen to look for Timor and the Nihilists.

"Do you want to catch Ivan?" asked Quicksilver.

The chief of the police was listening, and his interest was at once aroused.

"Who speaks of Ivan?" he inquired.

"I saw him half-an-hour ago," answered Quicksilver; "but he didn't see me."

"Where was he?"

"About half a mile off, seated in a sledge in the main road, looking as if he was waiting for some one."

"Perhaps he expected his nephew Timor," remarked Jack.

Irkontok waited to hear no more.

What he had heard was quite sufficient for him.

Putting a silver whistle to his lips, he blew it shrilly, and a sergeant at once came up, saluting his chief.

"Get ready a file of the guard, go to the main road, and bring in a man in a sledge."

"Yes, excellency."

"You will bring him dead or alive."

The sergeant departed, and in five

minutes the soldiers were paraded in heavy marching order outside.

Each was supplied with ten rounds of ball cartridge.

"May I accompany the expedition?" asked Jack.

"If you please," rejoined Irkontok.

"Then I will do so."

"You are a regular fire-eater."

"I?" said Jack.

"Yes; you want to be in everything," laughed the chief of the police.

"Oh," said Jack, shrugging his shoulders, "I like a little sport."

Owen looked annoyed.

"Why am I left out?" he demanded.

"You can stay and look after Quicksilver."

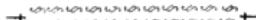
"Not much. I'm going with you."

"All right. Come along then," said Jack.

Nothing could separate the two chums.

"And I'll take a snooze," exclaimed Quicksilver, "for I have not had any sleep since I left St. Petersburg."

Suiting the action to the word, he threw himself upon some skins, and speedily fell into a heavy slumber, from which nothing less than the report of a cannon would have aroused him.



CHAPTER XLV.

TURNING THE TABLES.

JACK and Owen armed themselves with their revolvers, and started after the soldiers, who had already advanced.

They reached the road, under cover of the trees, without being perceived by the solitary individual who was waiting in the sledge.

He had been awaiting Timor's coming for two hours.

It was Ivan.

He was growing impatient, but did not dare to approach the cave, as he more than suspected something had happened.

Suddenly he heard the click of rifles being cocked, an unmistakable sound to the practised ear of one who has been a soldier.

Casting one frightened glance at the pine forest, he saw the fur caps and coats of the dreaded Cossacks.

They were already debouching upon the road.

With a startled cry, he raised his long whip and struck the horse violently.

The frightened animal dashed forward at a gallop.

"Halt!" shouted the sergeant of the guard.

Ivan paid no attention to this command, but continued to lash the horse furiously.

"Make ready, present. Fire!" roared the sergeant.

A report from six rifles was heard almost simultaneously.

The horse fell in the traces, shot through the heart, and the sledge came to an immediate standstill.

Strange to relate, Ivan was unharmed.

He stood up in the sledge, disdaining to fly, and held a pistol in each hand.

"Come on, base slaves of a cruel tyrant!" he cried.

"Surrend z!" said the sergeant.

"Never!" replied Ivan, boldly.

"Load!"

The cartridges were put in the breach, and the Cossacks prepared for another volley.

Meantime, Ivan fired right and left at his foes.

One soldier fell on the snow, which was quickly reddened with his streaming blood.

Owen was about to rush forward, when Jack dragged him back.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Take him single-handed," replied the fiery, impetuous Welshman.

"It is suicidal madness. He is armed and desperate. Leave him to the soldiers."

Reluctantly Owen Tudor allowed himself to be restrained.

Again the Cossacks fired, and this time Ivan sank back with a couple of bullets in his body.

His career was run.

The cruel and bloodthirsty Ivan, Duke of Cronstadt, who had led such a

chequered career, had at last met his fate at the hands of a few Cossacks in a gloomy pine forest.

It was a strange ending to the wild life of an unscrupulous schemer.

By the sergeant's orders the soldiers tore down some pine branches and made a rude litter.

The body was placed on this and taken back to the cave.

It was a melancholy procession.

Irkontok had heard the firing, and came out to meet them.

"Poor fellow," he said. "But the enemies of the emperor deserve no pity."

He had been on intimate terms with Ivan, and had received several large sums of money from him.

In fact they had been acquainted for years.

Long before Ivan had incurred the emperor's displeasure in the first instance and fled to England they had known one another.

He ordered a grave to be dug.

The body was hastily interred, and some heavy stones put over it to protect it from the ravages of the wolves.

Then he sent the soldiers back to bury their dead comrade.

Before, however, they could reach the spot, the wolves had been at work, scenting the carcase from afar.

All that remained of the unfortunate Cossack was a bleeding skeleton, over which a pack of gaunt, hungry wolves were snarling and fighting.

They instantly fired into them, killing several.

The rest ran away.

Then the soldiers buried the skeleton, and their minds went far away to their poor but happy homes on the steppes of the Tartary, where they lived in peace before the ruthless conscription forced them into the mighty army of the white czar.

Jack and Owen lost no time in commencing their search for the Nihilists.

It seemed to them that Ivan's presence in the high road was conclusive proof that he knew that his friends were lurking in the forest.

They started from the secret passage, and saw that the snow had been recently crushed.

Following these tracks, they shortly came upon spots of blood.

"We shall find them," exclaimed Jack.

"Better be careful," replied Owen, with more than his usual caution.

"Trust me," replied Jack.

They pursued the trail until they came to a grand old patriarchal tree, and then all further signs were lost.

Round the tree the snow had been trodden down and was discoloured.

Jack acknowledged himself puzzled.

"The tree isn't hollow," he said, knocking its gnarled trunk with the butt of his pistol.

"They must be somewhere about," answered Owen. "Give me a light for my cigarette."

While Jack was striking a light, half-a-dozen wild, weird figures noiselessly descended the tree.

Death's Head, Kravosky, and Ural were amongst them.

Before the young men had any suspicion of their proximity, for they had come down on the other side, these figures had closed in upon them.

They were seized by the legs and thrown violently upon their faces.

So sudden was the attack that they had no time to use their revolvers.

They were disarmed in an instant, and their own pistols presented at their heads.

"Rise," said Death's Head.

"Halloa!" cried Jack. "What is the meaning of this?"

"You are our prisoners!" was the reply, in a deep, stern voice. "You sought our destruction, but have come to your own!"

Jack was for a moment completely dumbfounded, but, recovering himself, he said—

"Where did you spring from?"

"The clouds," replied Death's Head.

"So I should think."

Jack and Owen were pushed round to the other side of the tree, where the clamps and nails were, and told to mount.

Death's Head went first.

Seeing how he progressed, they followed him, half stupefied at the suddenness of the disaster.

Their movements were accelerated by

Kravosky, who took an intense pleasure at prodding them with a knife.

At length, to their great relief, they reached the platform in the top of the tree, where the Nihilists' wooden house was built.

Great was their surprise at this ingenious contrivance.

Timor was sitting on a chair wrapped in thick sheep skins, and looking very pale and morose.

His wounds still pained him acutely.

The oil and tallow had only partially alleviated his sufferings.

When he saw Jack and Owen his face lighted up with a fierce satisfaction, amounting to exultation, which he could not disguise.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, in a bantering tone. "Is this really my old friend Jack and my equally esteemed acquaintance, Owen?"

Jack folded his arms.

"You ought to know me," he replied.

"And I know the Welsh goat too."

"You had better let us go," said Jack, "and I will use my influence with the emperor for all of you."

Timor laughed in a sepulchral manner.

"My dear fellow, do you take us for children?" he asked.

"Oh, dear, no."

"Do you imagine that I am destitute of feeling, and that I do not possess that leading passion, revenge?"

"Well?"

"You were kind enough to have me knouted until I fainted under the lash."

"That was because you whipped a girl."

"No matter. I cannot return the compliment, because we have no such instrument of torture here as a knout, and do not possess the means of making one, but—"

He paused abruptly and seemed to be thinking.

"Haven has delivered them into our hands," said Death's Head.

There was an awkward silence.

Timor at length spoke.

"I will think of various modes of torturing you both," he exclaimed at length; "but at present I have only hit upon one expedient."

"Let me hear it," said Death's Head.

"Take them outside the hut and tie a rope to their wrists, fasten the rope to a bough, and let them hang in the air."

"Excellent!" replied Death's Head.

Jack and Owen felt the perspiration come out in clammy beads on their foreheads.

It was an awful punishment.

Before they had time to think about it, they were rudely grasped by Kravosky and Ural, who fastened the cords round their wrists.

They were then led out into the cold frosty air and lowered from a bough of the tree.

The rope was made fast, and they dangled in the air with the cold east wind biting their faces.

This was Timor's Revenge.

The whole weight of their bodies hung upon their wrists and arms, which as they swung to and fro in the breeze soon began to ache fearfully.

They suffered the most excruciating pain.

It was like being racked.

They felt as if their arms would be torn out of the sockets, and their faces were convulsed with agony.

Neither of them could speak.

They could only look at one another with sympathetic glances.

Presently low moans were wrung from them in their agony.

Timor opened the door of the hut, and hanging on to a bough, looked upon his victims with an expression of diabolical delight.

"How long do you intend to keep them there?" asked Death's Head.

"Until they have lost all strength to howl," he replied.

"They seem to be suffering enough."

"Not half enough for me," hissed Timor.

"Hark at their cries."

"Let the dogs yell. I'll hang them by the heels, head downwards, next."

"That would kill them."

"And a good job too," answered Timor savagely.

He re-entered the hut and shut the door, for the wind was searchingly cold and bit shrewdly.

Jack and Owen gave themselves up to despair.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE GRAND DUKE.

WHEN the door was shut Death's Head sat down by the side of Timor.

"I must depart to intercept the Duke Alexis," he said. "Shall you accompany me?"

"No. I am not well enough," replied Timor.

"Will you mind the prisoners?"

"I can do that."

"Do you think I shall see anything of Ivan on the way?"

Timor was of the opinion that he would not, because Ivan would take the alarm at being kept waiting, and hasten to his estates in Poland, leaving Timor to follow him as he best could.

"Shall I leave anyone with you?" added Death's Head.

"Leave Kravosky."

"Very well; the others shall accompany me. If I am not back by dusk, you will know that I am either dead or captured."

"By the way," exclaimed Timor, "did you search the prisoners?"

"We did not."

"It ought to be done; you might find something important on them. Have them brought in, bind them, and I can amuse myself by kicking them."

Death's Head at once ordered the unfortunate captives to be hauled up.

They were laid on the floor more dead than alive, every muscle and sinew in their bodies aching terribly.

There was no chance of their running away or showing fight, for they found it impossible to move.

Ural searched them.

The papers sent to Jack by the courier Soltykoff from the emperor were found upon him.

Death's Head opened them with the utmost impatience.

"Ah!" he said, as he hastily ran his eye over the despatch, "the Grand Duke is on the way. I shall intercept him at the cross roads."

"Where are they?" inquired Timor.

"Not five miles from here. There is a posting-house where they will stop to change horses."

"What will you do with him if you capture him?"

"He is the czar's favourite brother, and to ransom him he will grant the reforms we ask for."

Timor shook his head as if he did not quite believe this, but Death's Head was satisfied that the course of action he was pursuing was correct.

Both Jack and Owen were securely bound, and left to the tender mercies of Timor and Kravosky.

The others took their departure to intercept and capture the Grand Duke.

When Death's Head and his followers, who, including Ural, were six in number, descended from their eyrie, they made a detour to avoid the cave.

It would never have done to encounter Irkoutok and his Cossacks.

By a devious route they reached the main road and proceeded to the spot known as the cross roads.

Here two roads met, and for the accommodation of travellers a road home or hotel had been erected.

It was very convenient for travellers coming to the city, for they could indulge in refreshment and have a rest while fresh horses were being attached to their carriages.

When Death's Head and his fellow conspirators arrived they heard the jingling of bells and saw a sledge approaching.

It was driven by one man, while inside were two persons, one a boyish-looking man, apparently about twenty-five years of age, who was the Grand Duke Alexis, the other being Soltykoff.

They had no guard or escort of any kind.

Hearing the bells and being warned previously by Soltykoff of the grand duke's expected coming, the landlord and three servants came out.

They stood bareheaded on the steps to welcome their distinguished guest.

The sledge drove up.

Suddenly Death's Head and the members of his band sprang into the road with their pistols levelled.

"Villains!" cried Soltykoff, "what do you want?"

The Nihilist chief discharged his pistols, and Soltykoff fell bathed in blood upon the bottom of the sledge.

Seeing this, the landlord of the inn and his men ran into the house.

Even their loyalty was not proof against a sudden irruption of bandits.

Life was sweet.

They did not want to be shot on short notice.

The grand duke bore himself as became one of his race, and, although his lips quivered, he did not show any fear.

Drawing a pistol, he aimed it at Death's Head and pulled the trigger.

The cap was damp; it snapped, and the pistol did not go off.

Next moment the Nihilist, with a fierce cry, precipitated himself upon the grand duke, and seizing him by the throat, bore him to the bottom of the sledge.

They were well matched.

A desperate struggle ensued, in which it was difficult to tell which would get the advantage.

The driver of the sledge sat perfectly still, reining in his horse, thinking no doubt that as a non-combatant his life would be respected.

By an accident the Duke Alexis got the Nihilist under him, and pressed his hands upon his throat.

His eyes started out of his head, and he breathed with difficulty.

Ural did not know what to do.

If he fired he might kill his chief, and he stood irresolute.

"Drive on," cried the duke.

The man was only waiting for orders, and he whipped up his horses, speeding them over the snow-covered ground.

When Ural saw that Death's Head was captured and being rapidly borne away from him he fired at the driver.

His example was followed by those with him, but their effort to stop the sledge came too late, and by a miracle the driver escaped the storm of bullets.

The leaden hail neither touched him nor his horse.

As the Grand Duke was kneeling at the bottom of the sledge and bending over Death's Head, it was not surprising that they escaped unhurt.

In vain the baffled Nihilists ran after the sledge.

Soltykoff's body had fallen out, and the Duke Alexis had a clear field.

When he had nearly choked the life out of Death's Head, he tied his hands and feet with handkerchiefs and placed his feet on his chest.

Able to breathe once more, the Nihilist looked up with bloodshot eyes.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked in a faint voice.

"You will see," replied the duke, oracularly.

"For pity's sake, kill me."

"Death is too good for such as you."

"Do you know who I am?"

"No. I simply know that you are a cowardly assassin, but my brother, the emperor, may be better acquainted with you."

"Shall you take me to him?"

"At once."

"Then my fate is sealed," replied Death's Head.

He knew that he had no mercy to expect from the emperor, and he resigned himself to the inevitable death which was in store for him.

The man did not shed tears or beg for mercy.

For years he had held his life in his hand, and had expected what was coming.

He had, if we may use the expression, doubly courted death; and it must be said for him, to his credit, that he did not dread it when it stared him in the face.

His belief was that he was a patriot, in the truest sense of the word.

Horace says it is sweet and proper to die for one's country, and the Nihilist did not begrudge giving his life to the good cause.

"Let me get up," said Death's Head, "and sit opposite you. It will not advantage you to keep me like a slave under your feet."

"Stay where you are," was the stern reply.

"Is there no mercy in the house of Romanoff?"

"None for such as you."

Death's Head was silent after this, for he was perfectly helpless, and knew that if he talked any more he would only be wasting his breath.

It took the jaded horse fully four hours to reach St. Petersburg.

When the driver entered the city he turned round and touched his cap.

"To the palace, your royal highness?" he asked.

"To the prison," was the reply.

The man at once drove to the gloomy fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, where the political prisoners were incarcerated.

A few words spoken to the sentry at the gate caused the doorway to be opened, and they entered.

The governor was summoned, and promptly came forth.

He was a little, stout, grizzled man, who had seen service on many a battlefield before he was appointed to the post he then held.

Instantly recognising the grand duke, he doffed his hat and stood in respectful silence.

"I have brought you a prisoner," said Alexis. "He tried to assassinate or capture me, I do not know which, and I have reason to suspect that he is connected with a desperate band of Nihilists."

The governor of the fortress looked closely at Death's Head.

"I know this man," he exclaimed.

"Who is he?"

"The Count of Cracow, a most desperate enemy of the government."

"Indeed."

"You have made a most important capture, your royal highness, and for which your imperial brother will thank you greatly."

"Cracow?" repeated the grand duke. "Was he not implicated in the Polish rising under Langievitsch?"

"The same."

"Keep him closely guarded and prepare to apply the torture."

"I will be ready."

"He must confess."

Death's Head smiled contemptuously.

"You may tear me limb from limb as the Bourbon did Damirius," he said, "but you will extort nothing from me."

"Wait," said the prince.

"I defy you," cried Death's Head.

"Away with him."

Death's Head was hurried into the prison, and the grand duke, jumping into his sledge, was driven to the Winter Palace, as fast as the tired horses could take him.

For an hour the Nihilist was left alone

in a cell to indulge in his reflections, which were not of the most agreeable character.

This can be readily imagined.

At the expiration of that time two warders brought in a galvanic battery, which they placed in a corner.

The Leyden jars were carefully charged with sulphuric acid.

Death's Head was placed in a chair and securely bound to it, so that he could not move.

He regarded these preparations curiously.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"Put no questions," was the curt reply.

When all was in readiness the door was thrown open, and four people entered.

One was the governor of the prison, the second, the public executioner, the third, the Grand Duke Alexis, and the fourth, no less a personage than the Emperor Alexander himself.

"Ha, tyrant!" cried Death's Head.

"Apply the torture," said the czar calmly.

The executioner went to the galvanic apparatus, and taking up two wires, attached them to the feet of the prisoner.

He then returned to the machine and began to vigorously turn a handle, which generated the electricity.

Every turn sent a shock through the prisoner's body, and every fresh turn increased the intensity of the stinging pain.

"Oh, oh! Stop!" said Death's Head, who felt as if his frame was being shattered to pieces.

"Confess where your accomplices are!" exclaimed the emperor.

The Nihilist simply groaned.

Making a sign the emperor caused the executioner to continue his ghastly work, in which he had paused.

"I cannot bear it," cried Death's Head.

"Confess."

"This is monstrous. Do you call this civilization—when a man is tortured privately in a dungeon?"

"Confess," said the emperor, a third time.

"I will."

There was a pause.

"Speak."

"Twenty-five miles from St. Petersburg, on the Eastern Road, there is a rock; this rock is hollow. You will know it by a group of nine pine trees standing in front. It is only a verst distant from Galatz, a small village of fifty inhabitants. Push open the door of this cavern, and you will find my friends."

The czar made an entry of these instructions in his note-book.

"Is that all you have to say?" he inquired.

"It is all."

"Count Cracow," added the czar, "your confession will not save your life. You have offended too deeply for that; but it will spare you further suffering."

"Let me live! Send me to the mines if you like, but—"

"It cannot be. You have escaped once from Siberia, and you have attempted my life, consequently your life is justly forfeited to the state."

"Life! Life!" cried the Nihilist.

"Impossible. You shall die quickly; that is all I can promise you."

The emperor turned to the executioner.

"Put on the full force of the battery, and end his misery at once," he commanded.

The executioner placed some more jars in the battery, arranged his wires, and once more sharply turned the handle.

Death's Head uttered a wild, piercing shriek.

Death's Head's face and limbs were distorted and convulsed, and then all was still.

He resembled one struck by lightning.

The action of the heart had stopped instantly by the increased force of electricity, and he was dead!

Feeling his pulse, the executioner said—

"It is all over, sire."

It was not the first time he had killed a political prisoner in this way.

The dread secrets of the dungeons of Russia will perhaps never be known in their entirety, yet this is one of them.

"Let him be buried within the precincts of the prison at midnight, and

leave no stone to mark his grave," exclaimed the emperor.

The governor of the prison bowed low.

Casting one glance of contempt, mingled with hatred, upon the rigid corpse of the dead Nihilist, the czar quitted the fortress arm-in-arm with his brother.

As they were being driven to the palace, the emperor remarked—

"I can breathe more freely now that fellow is dead."

"You dreaded him?" replied the Grand Duke.

"So much so that I could not sleep at night. He had sworn to kill me."

"It is lucky I captured him."

"Yes, and I am deeply indebted. If I can do anything for you, my dear brother, at any time, you have only to ask."

Alexis thanked him, and promised that he would not forget this instance of imperial favour.

On arriving at the palace, the emperor despatched a message to Irkontok, giving him information as to what had occurred, and directing him to make a raid upon the cavern of which Death's Head had spoken in his dying moments.

He also sent him a detachment of twenty Cossacks, fully provisioned for a week.

It was not until the following morning that the chief of the police received his orders.

He was greatly surprised and annoyed at the non-appearance of Jack and Owen, to whom he feared something had happened.

Effie and Quicksilver were equally agitated.

The latter had been looking in every direction for his young master, but without being able to find the slightest clue to his whereabouts.

It was concluded that he and Owen had fallen into the hands of the Nihilists.

When, therefore, Irkontok heard that Death's Head had been captured by the Grand Duke, and had confessed under torture to the exact locality of his companions' hiding-place, he rejoiced greatly.

He could seize them all, and release Jack and Owen Tudor.

Accordingly, he lost no time in orga-

nising his expedition, and went off in search of the cavernous rock.

The chief of the police took with him fifteen men, all armed to the teeth.

This he considered an overwhelming force.

Carefully studying the instructions sent him by the emperor, he proceeded along the western road towards the little village of Galatz.

The rock was soon found, and on the right side was a wooden door.

Selecting a Cossack of burly proportions, who was over six feet high, and weighed at least sixteen stone, he addressed him.

"Peterkoff," he said, "to you I shall assign the honour of breaking down the door."

"How shall I do it?" asked the soldier, simply.

"You will throw your whole weight against it, and it will burst open."

"And then?"

"Your companions will follow you closely, and you will kill the nest of vipers within."

"Very well, my captain," replied Peterkoff.

It was a dangerous duty which had been assigned him, for, supposing the cave to be occupied by Nihilists, he would receive the brunt of their fire.

Obedience to orders is, however, the first duty of the Russian soldier.

He goes blindly wherever his officers send him.

It is contrary to his military training to ask any superfluous questions or raise any objections.

Peterkoff raised his herculean shoulders.

He humped his back, and drew a deep breath.

His companions crowded at his heels.

They were all anxious to distinguish themselves.

Irkontok retreated a dozen yards or so, a revolver in each hand ready to cut off with a bullet the retreat of any who might perchance escape.

With all his force, like a human battering ram, Peterkoff hurled himself against the wooden door.

It broke, its fastenings gave way, and he rushed in.

All was darkness!

Suddenly a lurid light rose up from the floor, and an awful noise was heard.

The rock seemed to be rent asunder.

Mighty fragments rose in the air and were carried great distances, while the surrounding space was filled with stones and earth.

Peterkoff was blown to atoms, and not one of his fourteen companions was left alive!

Every man was killed.

The chief of the police alone was spared to witness this appalling catastrophe, which made even his cheek blanch with fear.

It was the last venomous effort of the cunning old Nihilist.

In this cave he had stored a quantity of dynamite.

He had hired the cavern from a farmer under the pretence of being a potato merchant.

He said that he wanted it to store the potatoes he intended to buy in the vicinity.

Instead of this, he placed a large quantity of that fearful explosive, dynamite, inside, and connected it with the door by an electric wire.

If he wanted to enter he could disconnect the wire.

This would enable him to do so with safety, but if any stranger attempted to enter, the result would be none other than that which had happened.

He had intended the dynamite to be used in blowing up the czar's palace as soon as he got an opportunity of placing it there.

When urged by the czar to confess where his companions were, he had thought of the cave.

It was his last chance of revenge.

If he could not kill the emperor, at least he could slay some of his soldiers or police.

He had been only too successful.

As soon as he had recovered from the shock which this awful occurrence had given him, Irkонток looked round.

On all sides of him were burnt and mutilated bodies.

Now he trod on an arm, again he kicked against a leg, or nearly fell over a trunk.

It was sickening.

With a drooping head he returned to the other cave to communicate the

mournful intelligence to the half score men he had left there.

Callous as he generally was to scenes of bloodshed and slaughter, the chief of the police was completely overcome at this awful disaster.

He was glad when he reached the cave.

The sentinel saluted.

Staggering into the cavern, he encountered Effie and Quicksilver, who were eagerly talking together.

"Vodka!" he exclaimed.

This was the rudely-distilled spirit drunk by the Russian peasants, of which they had found a complete store.

Quicksilver ran to the stone jar, and gave him some, which he drank with avidity.

"What is the matter?" asked Effie.

"We have been both deceived and betrayed," replied Irkонток.

"How?"

"Death's Head, in his dying confession, led us into a trap from which I have escaped by a miracle."

"Indeed!"

"All my brave Cossacks are killed."

"This is all a mystery to me," said Effie. "Will you explain and relieve my anxiety?"

Irkонток told her all that had happened, at which a thrill of horror ran through her sensitive frame.

"How dreadful!" she exclaimed. "But we have something to tell you."

"We?"

"Yes, Quicksilver and I. He has made a discovery."

"Of what nature?"

"One of the most important kind."

"I wish he could discover where the remainder of Death's Head's band are," cried Irkонток, bitterly.

"That is just what he has done."

Irkонток jumped about half a foot in the air.

"This is the best news I have heard for a long time," he said. "Tell me where they are."

Quicksilver said that he had been out scouting in the forest, and had seen two bodies hanging from a bough.

He did not think that bodies usually grew upon pine trees.

Being a good climber, he ascended the tree, and saw Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor, who had been tortured a second time by Timor's orders.

He spoke a few words to them and retreated.

"I have been waiting for you, sir," he concluded, "to know what is best to be done."

Irkонток reflected for a moment.

It was difficult to know what to do.

The chief of the police was placed in a delicate position.

"I think I had better send a courier for more men."

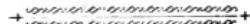
"If you do," replied Quicksilver, "Timor will kill Jack and Owen."

"The Nihilists will fight like demons."

"Let me surprise them in the dead of the night."

"Very well. Be it so," answered Irkонток.

He had only about nine men left to attack the Nihilists in their last resort; but he reckoned that if they could get up the tree and take them by surprise it would be enough.



CHAPTER XLVII.

CONCLUSION.

It was bitterly cold.

The wind blew cruelly from the east, and seemed to freeze the marrow in his bones.

Jack Dashley and Owen Tudor were lying exhausted on the floor of the hut, suffering acutely.

Their arms seemed out of joint.

Ural and the five remaining Nihilists were at sleep, but Timor was awake.

He was upset by the report that Ural had made of the capture of Death's Head by the grand duke.

Perhaps he would be put to the torture and betray them.

"Wake up!" he said, giving Jack a kick.

"I'm not asleep, you cowardly bully," replied Jack.

"I'll hang you up by your feet to-

morrow," cried Timor, "and that will finish you."

"Mind you are not hung up by the neck."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

Timor rose from his chair, and, seizing him by the hair, began to hit him in the face.

"How dare you insult me?" he yelled.

Jack was bound hand and foot, so that he could not retaliate.

All at once the door of the shanty was broken in, and Irkontok, followed by his Cossacks, entered.

They had been guided to the spot by Quicksilver.

A few shots were fired, and all the Nihilists were either killed or captured.

The surprise was complete.

They were taken down one by one and conveyed to the cave.

A few words from Irkontok explained to Jack what had happened, and both he and Owen felt new life come into their veins.

Their meeting with Quicksilver was quite affecting, the boy laughing and crying by turns; as for Effie, she was fairly transported with delight.

Timor had fought hard, and had been wounded in the leg, but he had to succumb at last.

A burly Cossack seized him by the throat, and hurled him to the ground.

When the fight was over, the chief of the police ordered Timor to be closely guarded.

He was placed in the inner cave, two men being detailed to watch him through the night.

Gloomy and morose, Timor sat on a stool, his face buried in his hands.

It was impossible for him to sleep.

Suddenly he roused himself from his lethargy and looked around him.

The two guards were standing near him, fully armed.

On a table stood an oil lamp, which diffused a feeble light through the cavern.

In a corner was a box, the lid of which was removed.

It was the ammunition box, and contained about three hundred cartridges.

Timor was desperate.

Well he knew that if he was taken a prisoner to St. Petersburg the emperor would show him no mercy.

He had offended too deeply to be forgiven.

Before the guards could divine what he intended to do, he seized the lamp, and hurled it with all his force into the box.

It broke into fragments, and the oil took light, communicating fire to the cartridges, which at once exploded.

The bullets flew about in all directions.

Timor was the first to fall a victim.

A dozen balls entered his body, and he sank a corpse upon the floor.

The guards were speedily killed, and when the occupants of the outer cave rushed in to ascertain the cause of the firing, they were terrified to see what had happened.

Timor was dead!

They could only guess at the cause of the disaster, for neither prisoner nor guards lived to tell the tale.

"He is gone," said Jack.

"Perhaps it's as well that it should be so," remarked Owen.

"He has brought it on himself."

"Yes; may heaven be more merciful to him than he was to others."

"Amen to that," replied Jack, bowing his head.

In the presence of death all his resentment towards his enemy vanished.

Timor was buried in the forest, and no stone marked the place where he rested.

Jack, however, afterwards caused a wooden cross to be placed over the grave.

The following morning they all went back to St. Petersburg, where the czar received them with great *empressement*.

He made Irkontok a count of the empire, and, hearing of Timor's death, gave all his estates to Jack Dashley.

Jack was married to Effie at the English Embassy.

He could not, however, stay in Russia all the time, so he took leave of the czar and his kind employers, Messrs. Kackop, Kine and Co., promising the emperor to visit St. Petersburg once a year.

Now he was a rich man.

Quicksilver became Jack's valet; Bill

Bragg, who had recovered from his wound, took them, including Owen Tudor, back to England.

When they were fairly afloat in the Baltic, Bragg slapped Jack on the shoulder.

"All's well that ends well," he exclaimed. "Slap-bang and all alive!"

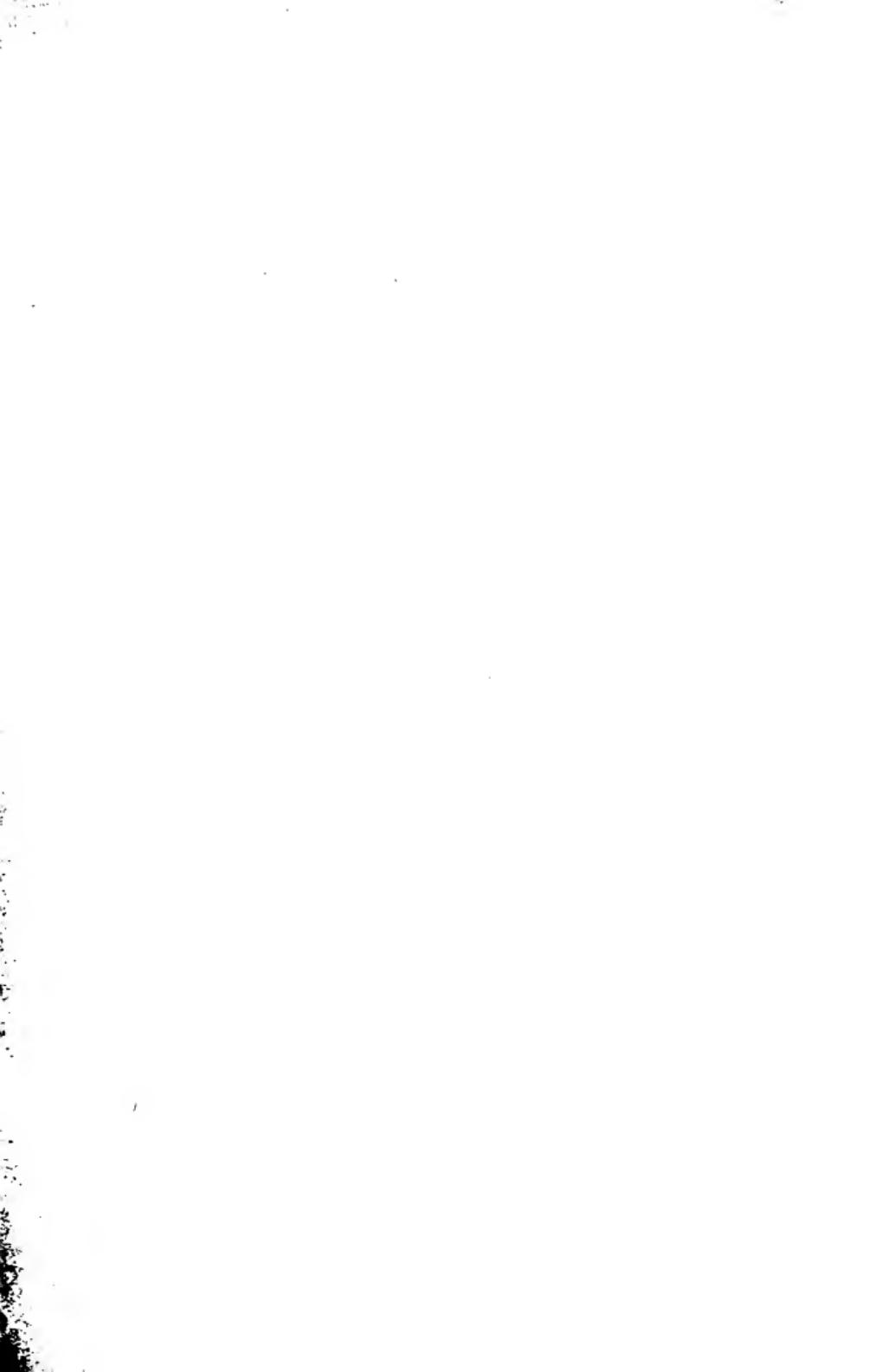
"Ask Effie," replied Jack.

Effie threw her arms round her young husband's neck and kissed him.

So, after many trials, our hero and his friends found a haven of rest.

When the friends met, as they often did, round Jack's hospitable board, conversation would turn upon their past adventures and TIMOR'S REVENGE.





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